

# **An Anarchist FAQ (14/17)**

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## **Appendix: Anarchism and Marxism**

This appendix exists to refute some of the many anti-anarchist diatribes produced by Marxists. While we have covered why anarchists oppose Marxism in section H, we thought it would be useful to reply to Marxist webpages and books whose content is not explicitly covered in that section. In this way we hope to indicate that Marxism is a flawed theory, flawed even to the extent of not being able to present a honest critique of anarchism. This consistent attempt to smear anarchism and distort its history and ideas is no co-incidence — rather it is required in order to present Marxism as the only viable form of socialism and, more importantly, to hide the fact that much of the populist Marxist rhetoric was, in fact, said by anarchists first and latter stolen by Marxists to hide the authoritarian basis of their politics.

One last point. We are aware that we repeat many of our arguments in these appendices. That, unfortunately, is avoidable for two reasons. Firstly, Marxists usually repeat the same false assertions against anarchism and so we have to answer them each time they appear. Marxists seem to subscribe to the point of view that repeating an error often enough makes it true. Secondly, we have tried to make each appendix as self-contained as possible and that meant repeating certain material and arguments to achieve this. We hope the reader understands.

# Reply to errors and distortions in David McNally's pamphlet "*Socialism from Below*"

Since this appendix was first written, David McNally has distanced himself from his pamphlet's critique of anarchism. In an end-note in his book **Another World Is Possible: Globalization & Anti-Capitalism** he wrote:

*"I dissent from Draper's one-sided critique of anarchism ... Draper is not fair to some of the currents within social anarchism. I also reject my own restatement of Draper's interpretation in the first edition of my booklet **Socialism from Below**"* [David McNally, **Another World Is Possible**, p. 393]

While it seems unlikely this was in response to reading our critique, it does show that it was correct. Unfortunately it took McNally over 20 years to acknowledge that his 1980 essay gave a distinctly distorted account of anarchism. Perhaps significantly, McNally no longer seems to be associated with the sister organisations of the **British Socialist Workers Party** (a group whose distortions of anarchism are infamous).

McNally now argues that "*it may be more helpful to try and defend a common political vision — such as socialism from below or libertarian socialism — as a point of reference*" rather than fixate over labels like "Marxism" or "anarchism." [Op. Cit., p. 347] As we noted in our critique of his 1980 pamphlet, the term "*socialism from below*" has a distinctly anarchist feel to it, a feel distinctly at odds with Leninist ideology and practice. Moreover, as shown below, Lenin explicitly denounced "*from below*" as an anarchist idea — and his practice once in power showed that "*from above*" is part and parcel of Leninism in action.

AFAQ Blog has a posting on this issue. In addition, many of the issues discussed in this appendix are also explored in section H of the FAQ and that should also be consulted. This is particularly the case as that section has been completed and revised after this appendix was completed.

## 1. Introduction

In chapter three of his pamphlet *Socialism from Below*, David McNally decides to expose (what he calls) "*The Myth Of Anarchist Libertarianism.*" In reality, his account is so distorted and, indeed, dishonest that all it proves is that Marxists will go to extreme lengths to attack anarchist ideas. As Brain Morris points out, defending the Leninist tradition and ideology "*implies ... a compulsive need to rubbish anarchism.*" [Ecology & Anarchism, p. 128] McNally's pamphlet is a classic example of this. As we will prove, his "case" is a mish-mash of illogical assertions, lies and, when facts do appear, their use is simply a means of painting a false picture of reality.

He begins by noting that “Anarchism is often considered to represent [a] current of radical thought that is truly democratic and libertarian. It is hailed in some quarters as the only true political philosophy [of] freedom.” Needless to say, he thinks that the “reality is quite different.” He argues that “[f]rom its inception anarchism has been a profoundly anti-democratic doctrine. Indeed the two most important founders of anarchism, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Michael Bakunin, developed theories that were elitist and authoritarian to the core.” We will discover the truth of this assertion later. However, we must note that McNally uses the typical Marxist approach to attacking anarchism — namely to attack anarchists rather than anarchism as such. Indeed, he lamely notes that “[w]hile later anarchists may have abandoned some of the excesses of their founding fathers their philosophy remains hostile to ideas of mass democracy and workers’ power.” Thus, we have the acknowledgement that not all anarchists share the same ideas and that anarchist theory has developed since 1876 (the year of Bakunin’s death). This is to be expected as anarchists are not Proudhonists or Bakuninists — we do not name ourselves after one person, rather we take what is useful from libertarian writers and ignore the rubbish. In Malatesta’s words, “[w]e follow ideas and not men, and rebel against this habit of embodying a principle in a man.” [Life and Ideas, p. 199] However, this is beside the point as McNally’s account of the anarchism of Proudhon and Bakunin is simply false — indeed, so false as to make you wonder if he is simply incompetent as a scholar or seeks to present a patchwork of lies as fact and “theory.”

## 2. Is anarchism the politics of the “small property owner”?

McNally does start out by acknowledging that “anarchism developed in opposition to the growth of capitalist society. What’s more, anarchist hostility to capitalism centred on defence of the liberty of the individual.” However, he then distorts this actual historical development by arguing that “the liberty defended by the anarchists was not the freedom of the working class to make collectively a new society. Rather, anarchism defended the freedom of the small property owner — the shopkeeper, artisan and tradesman — against the encroachments of large-scale capitalist enterprise.”

Such a position is, to say the least, a total distortion of the facts of the situation. Proudhon, for example, addressed himself to both the peasant/artisan and the proletariat. He argued in **What is Property?** that he “preach[ed] emancipation to the proletaires; association to the labourers.” [p. 137] Thus Proudhon addressed himself to both the peasant/artisan and the “working class” (i.e. wage slaves). This is to be expected from a **libertarian** form of socialism as, at the time of his writing, the majority of working people were peasants and artisans. Indeed, this predominance of artisan/peasant workers in the French economy lasted until the turn of the century. Not to take into account the artisan/peasant would have meant the dictatorship of a minority of working people over the rest of them. Given that in chapter 4 of his pamphlet McNally states that Marxism aims for a “democratic and collective society ... based upon the fullest possible political democracy” his attack on Proudhon’s concern for the artisan and peasant is doubly strange. Either you support the “fullest possible political democracy” (and so your theory must take into account artisans and peasants) or you restrict political democracy and replace it with rule by the few.

Thus Proudhon **did** support the “the freedom of the working class to make collectively a new society.” His ideas were aimed at both artisan/peasant and proletarian. Moreover, this position was a distinctly sensible and radical position to take:



*“While Marx was correct in predicting the eventual predominance of the industrial proletariat vis-à-vis skilled workers, such predominance was neither obvious nor a foregone conclusion in France during the nineteenth century. The absolute number of small industries even increased during most of the century...*

*Nor does Marx seem to have been correct concerning the revolutionary nature of the industrial proletariat. It has become a cliché of French labour history that during the nineteenth century artisans were much oftener radical than industrial workers. Some of the most militant action of workers in late nineteenth century France seems to have emerged from the co-operation of skilled, urbanised artisanal workers with less highly skilled and less urbanised industrial workers.”* [K. Steven Vincent, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism**, pp. 282–3]

The fruits of this union included the Paris Commune (an event both McNally and Marx praise — see section 12 for more discussion on this). In addition, as we will see, Proudhon’s proposals for a mutualist society included workers self-management and collective ownership of large scale workplaces as well as artisan and peasant production. This proposal existed **explicitly** for the proletariat, for wage slaves, and **explicitly** aimed to end wage labour and replace it by association and self-management (Proudhon stated that he aimed for “*the complete emancipation of the worker ... the abolition of the wage worker.*” [quoted by Vincent, **Op. Cit.**, p. 222]). Thus, rather than being backward looking and aimed at the artisan/peasant, Proudhon’s ideas looked to the present (and so the future) and to both the artisan/peasant **and** proletariat (i.e. to the **whole** of the working class in France at the time).

In the words of Gustav Landauer, Proudhon’s “*socialism ... of the years 1848 to 1851 was the socialism of the French people in the years 1848 to 1851. It was the socialism that was possible and necessary at that moment. Proudhon was not a Utopian and a prophet; not a Fourier and not a Marx. He was a man of action and realisation.*” [**For Socialism**, p. 108] Vincent makes the same point, arguing that Proudhon’s “*social theories may not be reduced to a socialism for only the peasant class, nor was it a socialism only for the petite bourgeois; it was a socialism of and for French workers. And in the mid-nineteenth century ... most French workers were still artisans... French labour ideology largely resulted from the real social experiences and aspirations of skilled workers ... Proudhon’s thought was rooted in the same fundamental reality, and therefore understandably shared many of the same hopes and ideals.*” [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 5–6] It is no coincidence, therefore, that when he was elected to the French Parliament in 1848 most of the votes cast for him were from “*working class districts of Paris — a fact which stands in contrast to the claims of some Marxists, who have said he was representative only of the petite bourgeoisie.*” [Robert L. Hoffman, quoted by Robert Graham, “*Introduction*”, P-J Proudhon, **General Idea of the Revolution**, p. xv]

Given that his proposals were aimed at the whole working class, it is unsurprising that Proudhon saw social change as coming from “*below*” by the collective action of the working class:

*“If you possess social science, you know that the problem of association consists in organising ... the producers, and by this organisation subjecting capital and subordinating power. Such is the war that you have to sustain: a war of labour against capital; a war of liberty against authority; a war of the producer against the non-producer; a war of equality against privilege ... to conduct the war to a successful conclusion, ... it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an*

*agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave.” [System of Economical Contradictions, pp. 397–8]*

In the same work he continues his discussion of proletarian self-organisation as the means of social change:

*“Thus power [i.e. the state] ... finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat... The problem before the labouring classes, then, consists, not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly, — that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them. Every proposition of reform which does not satisfy this condition is simply one scourge more ... which threatens the proletariat.” [Op. Cit., p. 399]*

Little wonder Proudhon saw the validity of his mutualist vision from the self-activity of French workers (see section A.1.5 for details). Where Proudhon differs from later anarchists like Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta and Goldman is that this self-activity is reformist in nature, that is seeking alternatives to capitalism which can reform it away rather than alternatives that can fight and destroy it. Thus Proudhon places his ideas firmly in the actions of working people resisting wage slavery (i.e. the proletariat, **not** the “*small property owner*”).

Similarly with Bakunin. He argued that “*revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses*” and so socialism can be achieved “*by the development and organisation, not of the political but of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses ... organise[d] and federate[d] spontaneously, freely, from the bottom up, by their own momentum according to their real interest, but never according to any plan laid down in advance and imposed upon the **ignorant masses** by some superior intellects.*” Such a socialist society would be based on “*the collective ownership of producers’ associations, freely organised and federated in the communes, and by the equally spontaneous federation of these communes.*” Thus “*the land, the instruments of work and all other capital [will] become the collective property of the whole of society and be utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations.*” And the means to this socialist society? Trade unionism (“*the complete solidarity of individuals, sections and federations in the economic struggle of the workers of all countries against their exploiters.*”) [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 237, pp. 197–8, p. 197, p. 174 and p. 177] Indeed, he considered trade unions (organised from the bottom up, of course) as “*the natural organisation of the masses*” and thought that “*workers’ solidarity in their struggle against the bosses ... [by] **trades-unions, organisation, and the federation of resistance funds***” was the means by which workers could emancipate itself “*through practical action.*” [The Basic Bakunin, p. 139 and p. 103]

And McNally asserts that “*the liberty defended by the anarchists was not the freedom of the working class to make collectively a new society*”! Only someone ignorant of anarchist theory or with a desire to deceive could make such an assertion.

Needless to say, McNally’s claim that anarchism is the politics of the “*small property owner*” would be even harder to justify if he mentioned Kropotkin’s **communist** anarchism. However, like Proudhon’s and Bakunin’s support for collective ownership by workers associations it goes unmentioned — for obvious reasons.

### 3. Does anarchism “glorify values from the past”?

McNally continues. He asserts, regardless of the facts, that anarchism “*represented the anguished cry of the small property owner against the inevitable advance of capitalism. For that reason, it glorified values from the past: individual property, the patriarchal family, racism.*”

Firstly, we should note that unlike Marx, anarchists did not think that capitalism was inevitable or an essential phase society had to go through before we could reach a free society. They did not share Marx’s viewpoint that socialism (and the struggle for socialism) had to be postponed until capitalism had developed sufficiently so that the “*centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation [sic!] of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument.*” [Karl Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 929] As McNally states, socialism was once the “*banner under which millions of working people resisted the horrors of the factory system and demanded a new society of equality, justice, freedom and prosperity.*” Unfortunately, the Marxist tradition viewed such horrors as essential, unavoidable and inevitable and any form of working class struggle — such as the Luddites — which resisted the development of capitalism was denounced. So much for Marxism being in favour of working class “*self-emancipation*” — if working class resistance to oppression and exploitation which does not fit into its scheme for “working class self-emancipation” then it is the product of ignorance or non-working class influences.

Thus, rather than representing “*the anguished cry of the small property owner against the inevitable advance of capitalism*” anarchism is rather the cry of the oppressed against capitalism and the desire to create a free society in the here and now and not some time in the future. To quote Landauer again:

*“Karl Marx and his successors thought they could make no worse accusation against the greatest of all socialists, Proudhon, than to call him a petit-bourgeois and petit-peasant socialist, which was neither incorrect nor insulting, since Proudhon showed splendidly to the people of his nation and his time, predominately small farmers and craftsmen, how they could achieve socialism immediately without waiting for the tidy process of big capitalism.” [Op. Cit., p. 61]*

Thus McNally confuses a desire to achieve socialism with backward looking opposition to capitalism. As we will see, Proudhon looked at the current state of society, not backwards, as McNally suggests, and his theory reflected both artisan/peasant interests and those of wage slaves — as would be expected from a socialist aiming to transform his society to a free one. The disastrous results of Bolshevik rule in Russia should indicate the dangers of ignoring the vast bulk of a nation (i.e. the peasants) when trying to create a revolutionary change in society.

Secondly, it is not really true that Proudhon or Bakunin “glorified” “individual property” as such. Proudhon argued that “*property is theft*” and that “*property is despotism.*” He was well aware of the negative side effects of individual property. Rather he wanted to abolish property and replace it with possession. We doubt that McNally wants to socialise **all** “property” (including individual possessions and such like). We are sure that he, like Marx and Engels, wants to retain individual possessions in a socialist society. Thus they state that the “*distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property*” and that “*Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation.*” [The

**Manifesto of the Communist Party**, p.47 and p. 49] Later Marx argued that the Paris Commune “*wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming the means of production, land and capital ... into mere instruments of free and associated labour.*” [**Selected Writings**, pp. 290–1]

Thus support for “*individual property*” is not confined to Proudhon (and we must note that Proudhon desired to turn capital over to associated labour as well — see section A.5.1 for Proudhon’s influence in the economic measures made during the Commune to create co-operatives).

Indeed, initially Marx had nothing but praise for Proudhon’s critique of Property contained in his classic work **What is Property?**:

“*Not only does Proudhon write in the interest of the proletarians he is himself a proletarian, an ouvrier. His work is a scientific manifesto of the French proletariat.*” [quoted by Rudolf Rocker, **Marx and Anarchism**]

As Rocker argues, Marx changed his tune simply to “*conceal from everyone just what he owed to Proudhon and any means to that end was admissible.*” This can be seen from the comments we quote above which clearly show a Proudhonian influence in their recognition that possession replaces property in a socialist society and that associated labour is its economic basis. However, it is still significant that Proudhon’s analysis initially provoked such praise by Marx — an analysis which McNally obviously does not understand.

It is true that Proudhon did oppose the socialisation of artisan and peasant workplaces. He considered having control over the means of production, housing, etc. by those who use it as a key means of maintaining freedom and independence. However, Proudhon also called for “*democratically organised workers’ associations*” to run large-scale industry in his 1848 Election Manifesto. [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 1, p. 62] This aspect of his ideas is continual throughout his political works and played a central role in his social theory. Thus to say that Proudhon “glorified” “individual property” distorts his position. And as the experience of workers under Lenin indicates, collective ownership by the state does not end wage labour, exploitation and oppression. Proudhon’s arguments in favour of possession and against capitalist and state ownership were proven right by Bolshevik Russia — state ownership did lead to “*more wage slavery.*” [**Ibid.**] As the forced collectivisation of the peasantry under Stalin shows, Proudhon’s respect for artisan/peasant possessions was a very sensible and humane position to take. Unless McNally supports the forced collectivisation of peasants and artisans, Proudhon’s solution is one of the few positions a socialist can take.

Moving on from Proudhon, we discover even less support for “individual property.” Bakunin, for example, was totally in favour of collective property and opposed individual property in the means of life. As he put it, “*the land, the instruments of work and all other capital [will] become the collective property of society and by utilised only by the workers, in other words by the agricultural and industrial associations.*” [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 174] With regards to peasants and artisans Bakunin desired **voluntary** collectivisation. “*In a free community,*” he argued, “*collectivism can only come about through the pressure of circumstances, not by imposition from above but by a free spontaneous movement from below.*” [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 200]). Thus, rather than being a defender of “individual property” Bakunin was in fact a supporter of **collective** property (as organised in workers’ associations and communes) and supported peasant and artisan property only in the sense of being against forced collectivisation (which would result in “*propelling [the peasants] into the camp of reaction.*” [**Op. Cit.**, p. 197])).

Hence Daniel Guerin's comments:

*"Proudhon and Bakunin were 'collectivists,' which is to say they declared themselves without equivocation in favour of the common exploitation, not by the State but by associated workers of the large-scale means of production and of the public services. Proudhon has been quite wrongly presented as an exclusive enthusiast of private property... At the Bale congress [of the First International] in 1869, Bakunin ... all[ied] himself with the statist Marxists ... to ensure the triumph of the principle of collective property."* [*"From Proudhon to Bakunin"*, **The Radical Papers**, Dimitrios I. Roussopoulos (ed.), p.32]

Similarly, while it is true that Proudhon **did** glorify the patriarchal family, the same cannot be said of Bakunin. Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin argued that "[e]qual rights must belong to both men and women," that women must "*become independent and free to forge their own way of life*" and that "[o]nly when private property and the State will have been abolished will the authoritarian juridical family disappear." He opposed the "*absolute domination of the man*" in marriage, urged "*the full sexual freedom of women*" and argued that the cause of women's liberation was "*indissolubly tied to the common cause of all the exploited workers — men and women.*" [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 396–7] Hardly what would be considered as the glorification of the patriarchal family — and a position shared by Kropotkin, Malatesta, Berkman, Goldman, Chomsky and Ward. Thus to state that "anarchism" glorifies the patriarchal family simply staggers belief. Only someone ignorant of both logic and anarchist theory could make such an assertion. We could make similar remarks with regards to the glorification of racism (as Robert Graham points out "*anti-semitism formed no part of Proudhon's revolutionary programme.*" [Op. Cit., p. xxxvi] The same can be said of Bakunin).

#### 4. Why are McNally's comments on Proudhon a distortion of his ideas?

McNally now attempts to provide some evidence for his remarks. He turns to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, "*widely proclaimed 'the father of anarchism.'*" As he correctly notes, he was a "*printer by vocation*" and that he "*strongly opposed the emergence of capitalism in France.*" However, McNally claims that Proudhon's "*opposition to capitalism was largely backward-looking in character*" as he "*did not look forward to a new society founded upon communal property which would utilise the greatest inventions of the industrial revolution. Instead, Proudhon considered small, private property the basis of his utopia. His was a doctrine designed not for the emerging working class, but for the disappearing petit bourgeoisie of craftsmen, small traders and rich peasants.*" Unfortunately McNally has got his facts wrong. It is well known that this was not the case (which is why McNally used the words "*largely backward-looking*" — he is aware of facts but instead downplays them).

If you look at Proudhon's writings, rather than what Marx and Engels **claimed** he wrote, it will soon be discovered that Proudhon in fact **favoured** collective ownership of large scale industry by workers' associations. He argued for "*the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations ... We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the*

*common cloth of the democratic social Republic.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 62] Three years later he stressed that "[e]very industry, operation or enterprise which by its nature requires the employment of a large number of workmen of different specialities, is destined to become a society or company of workers." [The General Idea of the Revolution, p. 216] This argument for workers' self-management and collective ownership follows on from his earlier comment in 1840 that "leaders" within industry "must be chosen from the labourers by the labourers themselves." [What is Property?, p. 414]

Rather than base his utopia on "*small, private property*" Proudhon based it on the actual state of the French economy — one marked by both artisan and large-scale production. The latter he desired to see transformed into the collective property of workers' associations and placed under workers' self-management. The former, as it did not involve wage-labour, he supported as being non-capitalist. Thus his ideas were aimed at both the artisan and the appearing class of wage slaves. Moreover, rather than dismiss the idea of large-scale industry in favour of "*small, private property*" Proudhon argued that "[l]arge industry ... come to us by big monopoly and big property: it is necessary in the future to make them rise from the [labour] association." [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism, p. 156] As Vincent correctly summarises:

*"On this issue, it is necessary to emphasise that, contrary to the general image given on the secondary literature, Proudhon was not hostile to large industry. Clearly, he objected to many aspects of what these large enterprises had introduced into society. For example, Proudhon strenuously opposed the degrading character of ... work which required an individual to repeat one minor function continuously. But he was not opposed in principle to large-scale production. What he desired was to humanise such production, to socialise it so that the worker would not be the mere appendage to a machine. Such a humanisation of large industries would result, according to Proudhon, from the introduction of strong workers' associations. These associations would enable the workers to determine jointly by election how the enterprise was to be directed and operated on a day-to-day basis."* [Op. Cit., p. 156]

As can be seen, McNally distorts Proudhon's ideas on this question.

McNally correctly states that Proudhon "*oppose[d] trade unions*." While it is true that Proudhon opposed strikes as counter-productive as well as trade unions, this cannot be said of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman, and so on. Bakunin, for example, considered trade unions as truest means of expressing the power of the working class and strikes as a sign of their "*collective strength*." [The Basic Bakunin, pp. 149–50] Why should Proudhon (the odd man out in anarchist theory with regards to this issue) be taken as defining that theory? Such an argument is simply dishonest and presents a false picture of anarchist theory.

Next McNally states that Proudhon "*violently opposed democracy*" and presents a series of non-referenced quotes to prove his case. Such a technique is useful for McNally as it allows him quote Proudhon without regard to when and where Proudhon made these comments and the context in which they were made. It is well known, for example, that Proudhon went through a reactionary phase roughly between 1852 and 1862 and so any quotes from this period would be at odds with his anarchist works. As Daniel Guerin notes:

*“Many of these masters were not anarchists throughout their lives and their complete works include passages which have nothing to do with anarchism.*

*“To take an example: in the second part of his career Proudhon’s thinking took a conservative turn.” [Anarchism, p. 6]*

Similarly, McNally fails to quote the many statements Proudhon made in favour of democracy. Why should the anti-democratic quotes represent anarchism and not the pro-democratic ones? Which ones are more in line with anarchist theory and practice? Surely the pro-democratic ones. Hence we find Proudhon arguing that “[i]n democratising us, revolution has launched us on the path of industrial democracy” and that his People’s Bank “embodies the financial and economic aspects of modern democracy, that is, the sovereignty of the People, and of the republican motto, **Liberty, Equality, Fraternity**.” We have already mentioned Proudhon’s support for workers’ self-management of production and his People’s Bank was also democratic in nature — “A committee of thirty representatives shall be set up to see to the management of the Bank ... They will be chosen by the General Meeting ... [which] shall consist of not more than one thousand nominees of the general body of associates and subscribers ... elected according to industrial categories and in proportion to the number of subscribers and representatives there are in each category.” [Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, p. 63, p. 75 and p. 79] Thus, instead of bourgeois democracy Proudhon proposes industrial and communal democracy:

*“In place of laws, we will put contracts [i.e. free agreement]. — No more laws voted by a majority, nor even unanimously; each citizen, each town, each industrial union, makes its own laws.” [The General Idea of the Revolution, pp. 245–6]*

*“If political right is inherent in man and citizen, consequently if suffrage ought to be direct, the same right is inherent as well, so much the more so, for each corporation [i.e. self-managed industry], for each commune or city, and the suffrage in each of these groups, ought to be equally direct.” [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, Op. Cit., p. 219]*

*“In order that the association may be real, he who participates in it must do so ... as an active factor; he must have a deliberative voice in the council ... everything regarding him, in short, should be regulated in accordance with equality. But these conditions are precisely those of the organisation of labour.” [quoted by K. Steven Vincent, Op. Cit., pp. 155–6]*

Do these quotes suggest a man “violently opposed [to] democracy”? Of course not. Nor does McNally quote Proudhon when he stated that “[b]esides universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the binding mandate. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy.” He also supported freedom of association, assembly, religion, of the press and of thought and speech. [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 63] Nor does McNally note Proudhon’s aim of (and use of the term) “industrial democracy” which would be “a reorganisation of industry, under the jurisdiction of all those who compose it.” [quoted by Vincent, Op. Cit., p. 225] As can be seen, Proudhon’s position on democracy is not quite what McNally suggests.

Thus McNally presents a distorted picture of Proudhon’s ideas and thus leads the reader to conclusions about anarchism violently at odds with its real nature. It is somewhat ironic that

McNally attacks Proudhon for being anti-democratic. After all, as we indicate in section 8 below, the Leninist tradition in which he places himself has a distinct contempt for democracy and, in practice, destroyed it in favour of party dictatorship.

Lastly, McNally states that Proudhon “*opposed emancipation for the American blacks and backed the cause of the southern slave owners during the American Civil War.*” In fact, the American Civil War had very little to do with slavery and far more to do with conflicts within the US ruling class. Proudhon opposed the North simply because he feared the centralisation that such a victory would create. He did not “tolerate” slavery. As he wrote in **The Principle of Federation** “*the enslavement of part of a nation denies the federal principle itself.*” [p. 42f] Moreover, what are we to draw from Proudhon’s position with regards the American Civil War about anarchism? Bakunin supported the North (a fact unmentioned by McNally). Why is Proudhon’s position an example of anarchism in practice and not Bakunin’s? Could it be that rather than attack anarchism, McNally attacks anarchists?

Also, it is somewhat ironic that McNally mentions Proudhon’s “support” for the South as the Leninist tradition he places his own politics is renown for supporting various dictatorships during wars. For example, during the Vietnam war the various Leninist groups called for victory to North Vietnam, a Stalinist dictatorship. During the Gulf War, they called for victory to Iraq, another dictatorship. In other words, they “tolerated” and “supported” anti-working class regimes, dictatorships and repression of democracy. They stress that they do not politically support these regimes, rather they wish these states to win in order to defeat the greater evil of imperialism. In practice, of course, such a division is hard to defend — for a state to win a war it must repress its own working class and so, in calling for a victory for a dictatorship, they must support the repression and actions that state requires to win the war. After all, an explosion of resistance, class struggle and revolt in the “lesser imperialist power” will undermine its war machine and so lead to its defeat. Hence the notion that such calls do not mean support for the regime is false. Hence McNally’s comments against Proudhon smack of hypocrisy — his political tradition have done similar things and sided with repressive dictatorships during wars in the name of political aims and theory. In contrast, anarchists have consistently raised the idea of “**No war but the class war**” in such conflicts (see section A.3.4).

## 5. Why are McNally’s comments on Bakunin a distortion of his ideas?

McNally then moves on to Bakunin whom he states “*shared most of Proudhon’s views.*” The truth is somewhat different. Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin supported trade unions and strikes, equality for women, revolution and far more extensive collectivisation of property. In fact, rather than share most of his views, Bakunin disagreed with Proudhon on many subjects. He did share Proudhon’s support for industrial self-management, self-organisation in self-managed workers’ associations from below, his hatred of capitalism and his vision of a decentralised, libertarian socialist society. It is true that, as McNally notes, “*Bakunin shared [Proudhon’s] anti-semitism*” but he fails to mention Marx and Engels’ many racist remarks against Slavs and other peoples. Also it is not true that Bakunin “*was a Great Russian chauvinist convinced that the Russians were ordained to lead humanity into anarchist utopia.*” Rather, Bakunin (being Russian) hoped Russia would have a libertarian revolution, but he also hoped the same for France, Spain, Italy and all countries in Europe (indeed, the world). Rather than being a “*Great Russian chauvinist*” Bakunin opposed the



Russian Empire (he wished “*the destruction of the Empire of All the Russias*” [The Basic Bakunin, p. 162]) and supported national liberation struggles of nationalities oppressed by Russia (and any other imperialist nation).

McNally moves on to Bakunin’s on revolutionary organisation methods, stating that they “*were overwhelmingly elitist and authoritarian.*” We have discussed this question in some detail in section J.3.7 (Doesn’t Bakunin’s “*Invisible Dictatorship*” prove that anarchists are secret authoritarians?) and so will not do so here. However, we should point out that Bakunin’s viewpoints on the organisational methods of mass working class organisations and those of political groupings were somewhat different.

The aim of the political grouping was to exercise a “*natural influence*” on the members of working class unions and associations, seeking to convince them of the validity of anarchist ideas. The political group did not aim to seize political power (unlike Marxists) and so it “*rule[d] out any idea of dictatorship and custodial control.*” Rather the “*revolution would be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from below upwards by means of revolutionary delegation.*” All the political group could do was to “*assist the birth of the revolution by sowing ideas corresponding to the instincts of the masses ... [and act] as intermediaries between the revolutionary idea and the popular instinct.*” The political group thus “*help[s] the people towards self-determination on the lines of the most complete equality and the fullest freedom in every direction, without the least interference from any sort of domination.*” [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 172 and p. 191]

As regards the forms of popular organisations Bakunin favoured, he was clear it would be based on “*factory, artisan, and agrarian sections*” and their federations [Statism and Anarchy, p. 51]. In other words, trade unions organised from the bottom up and based upon self-management in “*general membership meetings ... [i.e.] popular assemblies ... [where] the items on the agenda were amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed.*” The “*federative alliance of all the workers’ associations ... will constitute the commune ... [with] deputies invested with imperative, always responsible, and always revocable mandates.*” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 247 and p. 153]

Given McNally’s praise of the Paris Commune and the Russian soviets, it seems strange that Bakunin’s comments with regards to revolutionary social organisation with its obvious parallels to both should not be mentioned by McNally. Perhaps because to do so would totally undermine his case? Thus rather than being “*overwhelmingly elitist and authoritarian*” Bakunin’s ideas on a future society bar marked similarities to the actual structures created by working people in struggle and are marked by libertarian and self-managed visions and concepts — as anyone familiar with Bakunin’s work would know.

McNally then quotes “*one historian*” on Bakunin (not even providing a name makes evaluating the accuracy of the historian’s work impossible and so leaves the reader in the dark as to whether the historian does provide a valid account of Bakunin’s ideas). The unnamed author states that:

*“The International Brotherhood he founded in Naples in 1865–66 was as conspiratorial and dictatorial as he could make it, for Bakunin’s libertarianism stopped short of the notion of permitting anyone to contradict him. The Brotherhood was conceived on the Masonic model, with elaborate rituals, a hierarchy, and a self-appointed directory consisting of Bakunin and a few associates.”*

However, as we argue in section J.3.7, this description of Bakunin’s secret societies is so distorted as to be useless. To point to just **two** examples, the historian T.R. Ravindranathan indicates

that after the Alliance was founded “Bakunin wanted the Alliance to become a branch of the International [Worker’s Association] and at the same time preserve it as a secret society. The Italian and some French members wanted the Alliance to be totally independent of the IWA and objected to Bakunin’s secrecy. Bakunin’s view prevailed on the first question as he succeeded in convincing the majority of the harmful effects of a rivalry between the Alliance and the International. On the question of secrecy, he gave way to his opponents...” [Bakunin and the Italians, p. 83] Moreover, the Spanish section of the Alliance “survived Bakunin ... yet with few exceptions it continued to function in much the same way as it had done during Bakunin’s lifetime.” [George R. Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain*, p. 43] Hardly what you would expect if McNally’s vision was accurate.

In summary, McNally’s comments are a distortion of Bakunin’s ideas and activities. McNally represents a distorted picture of one aspect of Bakunin’s ideas while ignoring those aspects which support working class self-organisation and self-management.

## 6. Are the “quirks of personality” of Proudhon and Bakunin listed by McNally actually rooted “in the very nature of anarchist doctrine”?

After chronicling the failings and distorting the facts of two individuals, McNally tries to generalise. “These characteristics of Bakunin and Proudhon,” he argues, “were not mere quirks of personality. Their elitism, authoritarianism and support for backward-looking and narrow-minded causes are rooted in the very nature of anarchist doctrine.” Thus McNally claims that these failings of Proudhon and Bakunin are not personal failings but rather political. They represent the reactionary core of anarchist politics. However, his position leaves something to be desired. For example, the question remains, however, why, say, Proudhon’s support of the South during the American Civil War is an example of “anarchist doctrine” while Bakunin’s support of the North is not. Or why Proudhon’s opposition to trade unions and strikes is an example of “anarchist doctrine” while Bakunin’s (and Kropotkin’s, Malatesta’s, Berkman’s, Goldman’s, etc) support for strikes and union organisation is not. Or why Proudhon’s sexism is another example but Bakunin’s, Kropotkin’s, Goldman’s, Malatesta’s, et al support for women’s equality is not. Indeed, rather than take examples which are common to anarchist theorists McNally takes only those positions held by one, at most two, major anarchist thinkers (positions tangential to the core of their ideas and, indeed, directly opposed to them). From this minority of examples he generalises a theory — and so violates the basic principles of the scientific method!

These examples in themselves prove the weakness of McNally’s claims and the low levels of scholarship which lay behind them. Indeed, it is amazing that the SWP/ISO printed this diatribe — it obviously shows their contempt for facts, history and the intelligence of their desired audience.

## 7. Are anarchists against democracy?

McNally goes onto assert the following:

*“Originating in the revolt of small property owners against the centralising and collectivising trends in capitalist development (the tendency to concentrate production in fewer and fewer large workplaces), anarchism has always been rooted in a hostility to*

*democratic and collectivist practices. The early anarchists feared the organised power of the modern working class.”*

We have already refuted the claim that the “early anarchists feared the organised power of the modern working class.” We will now indicate why McNally is wrong to claim that anarchists express “hostility to democratic and collectivist practices.”

As indicated above Proudhon supported collective ownership and management of large-scale workplaces (i.e. those which employ wage-slaves under capitalism). Thus he clearly was in favour of economic direct democracy and collective decision making by groups of workers. Similarly, Bakunin also supported workers’ productive associations like co-operatives and envisioned a free society as being based on workers’ collective ownership and the self-management of production by the workers themselves. In addition, he supported trade unions and saw the future society as being based on federations of workers’ associations. To claim that anarchists are hostile to democratic and collectivist practices is simply not true. As would be clear to anyone reading their works.

McNally then asserts that “[t]o this day, most anarchists defend the ‘liberty’ of the private individual against the democratically made decisions of collective groups.” Here McNally takes a grain of truth to create a lie. Yes, anarchists **do** defend the liberty of individuals to rebel against the decisions of collective groups (we should point out that Marxists usually use such expressions as a euphemism for the state, but here we will take it at face value). Why? For two reasons. Firstly, the majority is not always right. Secondly, simply because progress is guaranteed by individual liberty — by **dissent**. That is what McNally is attacking here — the right of individuals and groups to dissent, to express themselves and live their own lives.

As we argue in section A.2.11, most anarchists are in favour of direct democracy in free associations. However, we agree with Carole Pateman when she argues:

*“The essence of liberal social contract theory is that individuals ought to promise to, or enter an agreement to, obey representatives, to whom they have alienated their right to make political decisions ... Promising ... is an expression of individual freedom and equality, yet commits individuals for the future. Promising also implies that individuals are capable of independent judgement and rational deliberation, and of evaluating and changing their own actions and relationships; promises may sometimes justifiably be broken. However, to promise to obey is to deny or limit, to a greater or lesser degree, individuals’ freedom and equality and their ability to exercise these capacities. To promise to obey is to state that, in certain areas, the person making the promise is no longer free to exercise her capacities and decide upon her own actions, and is no longer equal, but subordinate.” [The Problem of Political Obligation, p. 19]*

Thus, for anarchists, a democracy which does not involve individual rights to dissent, to disagree and to practice civil disobedience would violate freedom and equality, the very values McNally claims to be at the heart of Marxism. He is essentially arguing that the minority becomes the slave of the majority — with no right of dissent when the majority is wrong. In effect, he wishes the minority to be subordinate, not equal, to the majority. Anarchists, in contrast, because they support self-management also recognise the importance of dissent and individuality — in essence, because they are in favour of self-management (“democracy” does not do the con-

cept justice) they also favour the individual freedom that is its rationale. We support the liberty of private individuals because we believe in self-management (“democracy”) so passionately.

Simply put, Marxism (as McNally presents it here) flies in the face of how societies change and develop. New ideas start with individuals and minorities and spread by argument and by force of example. McNally is urging the end of free expression of individuality. For example, who would seriously defend a society that “democratically” decided that, say, homosexuals should not be allowed the freedom to associate freely? Or that inter-racial marriage was against “Natural Law”? Or that socialists were dangerous subversives and should be banned? He would, we hope (like all sane people), recognise the rights of individuals to rebel against the majority when the majority violate the spirit of association, the spirit of freedom and equality which should give democracy its rationale.

Indeed, McNally fails to understand the rationale for democratic decision making — it is not based on the idea that the majority is always right but that individual freedom requires democracy to express and defend itself. By placing the collective above the individual, McNally undermines democracy and replaces it with little more than tyranny by the majority (or, more likely, those who claim to represent the majority).

If we take McNally’s comments seriously then we must conclude that those members of the German (and other) Social Democratic Party who opposed their party’s role in supporting the First World War were acting in inappropriately. Rather than express their opposition to the war and act to stop it, according to McNally’s “logic” they should have remained in their party (after all, **leaving** the party meant ignoring the democratic decision of a collective group!), accepted the democratic decision of collective groups and supported the Imperialist slaughter in the name of democracy. Of course, McNally would reject such a position — in **this** case the rights of minorities take precedence over the “*democratic decisions of collectives*.” This is because the majority is not always right and it is only through the dissent of individuals and minorities that the opinion of the majority can be moved towards the right one. Thus his comments are fallacious.

Progress is determined by those who dissent and rebel against the status quo and the decisions of the majority. That is why anarchists support the right of dissent in self-managed groups — in fact, as we argue in section A.2.11, dissent, refusal, revolt by individuals and minorities is a key aspect of self-management. Given that Leninists do not support self-management (rather they, at best, support the Lockean notion of electing a government as being “democracy”) it is hardly surprising they, like Locke, views dissent as a danger and something to denounce. Anarchists, on the other hand, recognising that self-management’s (i.e. direct democracy) rationale and base is in individual freedom, recognise and support the rights of individuals to rebel against what they consider as unjust impositions. As history shows, the anarchist position is the correct one — without rebellion, numerous minorities would never have improved their position. Indeed, McNally’s comments is just a reflection of the standard capitalist diatribe against strikers and protestors — they don’t need to protest, for they live in a “democracy.”

So, yes, anarchists do support individual freedom to resist even democratically made decisions simply because democracy **has to be** based on individual liberty. Without the right of dissent, democracy becomes a joke and little more than a numerical justification for tyranny. Thus McNally’s latter claim that the “*challenge is to restore to socialism its democratic essence, its passionate concern with human freedom*” seems farcical — after all, he has just admitted that Marxism aims to eliminate individual freedom in favour of “*collective groups*” (i.e. the government). Unless of course he means freedom for the abstraction “humanity” rather than concrete freedom of the

individual to govern themselves as individuals and as part of freely joined self-managed associations? For those who really seek to restore to socialism its passionate concern for freedom the way it clear — anarchism. Hence Murray Bookchin's comments:

*"Marxism[']s ... perspectives are orientated not towards concrete, existential freedom, but towards an abstract freedom — freedom for 'Society', for the 'Proletariat', for categories rather than for people."* [Post Scarcity Anarchism, pp. 225–6]

Anarchism, on the other hand, favours freedom for people and that implies two things — individual freedom and self-management (direct democracy) in free associations. Any form of "democracy" not based on individual freedom would be so contradictory as to be useless as a means to human freedom (and vice versa, any form of "individual freedom" — such a liberalism — which denies self-management would be little more than a justification for minority rule and a denial of human freedom).

Ultimately, McNally's attack on anarchism fails simply because the majority is not always right and dissent a key to progress. That he forgets these basic facts of life indicates the depths to which Marxists will sink to distort the truth about anarchism.

Not that those in the Bolshevik tradition have any problem with individuals ignoring the democratic decisions of collective groups. The Bolsheviks were very happy to let individuals ignore and revoke the democratic decisions of collective groups — **as long as the individuals in question were the leaders of the Bolshevik Party**. As the examples we provide later (in section 8) indicate, leading lights in the Leninist tradition happily placed the rights of the party before the rights of working people to decide their own fate.

Thus McNally comments are strange in the extreme. Both anarchists and Leninists share a belief that individuals can and should have the right to ignore decisions made by groups. However, Leninists seem to think only the government and leadership of the Party should have that right while anarchists think **all** should. Unlike the egalitarian support for freedom and dissent for all anarchists favour, Leninists have an elitist support for the right of those in power to ignore the wishes of those they govern. Thus the history of Marxist parties in power expose McNally as a hypocrite. As we argue in section 14, Marxist ideology provides the rationale for such action.

Moreover, in spite of McNally's claim that the Leninist tradition is democratic we find Lenin arguing that the *"irrefutable experience of history has shown that ... the dictatorship of individual persons was often the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes."* [quoted by Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers Control**, p. 40] Such a comment is not an isolated one, as we indicate in section 8 and indicates well the anti-democratic nature of the tradition McNally places himself in. Thus McNally's attempt to portray anarchism as "anti-democratic" is somewhat ironic.

And we must note, as well as refuting McNally's claim that Leninism is a democratic tradition, Lenin's comments display a distinct confusion over the nature of a **social** revolution (rather than a political one). Yes, **previous** revolutions may have utilised the dictatorship of individuals but these revolutions have been revolutions from one class system to another. The "revolutionary" classes in question were **minority** classes and so elite rule would not in any way undermine their class nature. Not so with a **socialist** revolution which must be based on mass participation (in every aspect of society, economic, political, social) if it is to achieve its goals — namely a classless society. Little wonder, with such theoretical confusion, that the Russian revolution ended in

Stalinism — the means uses determined the ends (see sections 13 and 14 for more discussion of this point).

McNally then states that anarchists “*oppose even the most democratic forms of collective organisation of social life. As the Canadian anarchist writer George Woodcock explains: ‘Even were democracy possible, the anarchist would still not support it ... Anarchists do not advocate political freedom. What they advocate is freedom from politics ...’ That is to say, anarchists reject any decision-making process in which the majority of people democratically determine the policies they will support.*”

First, we must point out a slight irony in McNally’s claim. The irony is that Marxists usually claim that they seek a society similar to that anarchists seek. In the words of Marx:

*“What all socialists understand by anarchy is this: once the aim of the proletarian movement, the abolition of classes, has been attained, the power of the State ... disappears, and the functions of government are transformed into simple administrative functions.”*  
[Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 76]

So, Marxists and anarchists seek the same society, one of individual freedom. Hence McNally’s comments about anarchism also apply (once the state “withers away”, which it never will) to Marxism. But, of course, McNally fails to mention this aspect of Marxism and its conflict with anarchism.

However, our comments above equally apply here. Anarchists are not opposed to people in free associations democratically determining the policies they will support (see section A.2.11 for more details on this). What we **do** oppose is the assumption that the majority is always right and that minorities should submit to the decisions of the majority no matter how wrong they are. We feel that history is on our side on this one — it is only by the freedom to dissent, by the direct action of minorities to defend and extend their freedoms that society progresses. Moreover, we feel that theory is on our side — majority rule without individual and minority rights is a violation of the principle of freedom and equality which democracy is said to be built on.

Democracy should be an expression of individual liberty but in McNally’s hands it is turned into bourgeois liberalism. Little wonder Marxism has continually failed to produce a free society. It has no conception of the relationship of individual freedom to democracy and vice versa.

## 8. Are Leninists in favour of democracy?

McNally’s attack on Proudhon (and anarchism in general) for being “anti-democratic” is somewhat ironic. After all, the Leninist tradition he places himself in did destroy democracy in the workers’ soviets and replaced it with party dictatorship. Thus his attack on anarchism can be turned back on his politics, with much more justification and evidence.

For example, in response to the “*great Bolshevik losses in the soviet elections*” during the spring and summer of 1918 “*Bolshevik armed force usually overthrew the results of these provincial elections ... [In] the city of Izhevsk [for example] ... in the May election [to the soviet] the Mensheviks and SRs won a majority ... In June, these two parties also won a majority of the executive committee of the soviet. At this point, the local Bolshevik leadership refused to give up power ... [and by use of the military] abrogated the results of the May and June elections and arrested the SR and Menshevik members of the soviet and its executive committee.*” In addition, “*the government continually postponed the new general elections to the Petrograd Soviet, the term of which had ended in March 1918.*”

*Apparently, the government feared that the opposition parties would show gains.*" [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, pp. 23–4 and p. 22]

In the workplace, the Bolsheviks replaced workers' economic democracy with "one-man management" selected from above, by the state (*"The elective principle must now be replaced by the principle of selection"* — Lenin). Trotsky did not consider this a result of the Civil War — *"I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully."* [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 63 and pp. 66–7] He pushed the ideas of "militarisation of labour" as well as abolishing democratic forms of organisation in the military (this later policy occurred **before** the start of the Civil War — as Trotsky put it, the *"elective basis is politically pointless and technically inexpedient and has already been set aside by decree"* [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, pp.37–8]).

In May 1921, the All-Russian Congress of the Metalworkers' Union met. The *"Central Committee of the [Communist] Party handed down to the Party faction in the union a list of recommended candidates for **union** (sic!) leadership. The metalworkers' delegates voted down the list, as did the Party faction in the union ... The Central Committee of the Party disregarded every one of the votes and appointed a Metalworkers' Committee of its own. So much for 'elected and revocable delegates.' Elected by the union rank and file and revocable by the Party leadership!"* [M. Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 83]

These are a few examples of Trotsky's argument that you cannot place *"the workers' right to elect representatives above the party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy!"* He continued by stating the *"Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 78]

Thus, **when in power**, Trotsky did not *"insist against all odds that socialism was rooted in the struggle for human freedom"* as McNally claims he did in the 1920s and 1930s (as we discuss in section 15, Trotsky did not do it then either). Rather, he thought that the *"very principle of compulsory labour is for the Communist quite unquestionable ... the only solution to economic difficulties from the point of view of both principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power ... and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation and utilisation."* Can human freedom be compatible with the *"introduction of compulsory labour service [which] is unthinkable without the application ... of the methods of militarisation of labour"*? Or when the *"working class cannot be left wandering round all over Russia. They must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded, just like soldiers."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 66 and p. 61]

Of course McNally tries to blame the destruction of democracy in Russia on the Civil War but, as indicated above, the undermining of democracy started **before** the civil war started and continued after it had finished. The claim that the "working class" had been destroyed by the war cannot justify the fact that attempts by working class people to express themselves were systematically undermined by the Bolshevik party. Nor does the notion of an "exhausted" or "disappeared" working class make much sense when *"in the early part of 1921, a spontaneous strike movement ... took place in the industrial centres of European Russia"* and strikes involving around 43 000 per year took place between 1921 and 1925. [Samuel Farber, **Op. Cit.**, p. 188 and

p. 88] While it is undeniable that the working class was reduced in numbers because of the civil war, it cannot be said to have been totally “exhausted” and, obviously, did survive the war and was more than capable of collective action and decision making. Strikes, as Bakunin argued, “*indicate a certain collective strength*” and so rather than there being objective reasons for the lack of democracy under Lenin we can suggest **political** reasons — the awareness that, given the choice, the Russian working class would have preferred someone else in power!

Also, we must point out a certain ingenuity in McNally’s comments that Stalinism can be explained purely by the terrible civil war Russia experienced. After all, Lenin himself stated that every “*revolution ..., in its development, would give rise to exceptionally complicated circumstances*” and “[r]evolution is the sharpest, most furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances.” [Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?, p. 80 and p. 81] Thus McNally’s assertion that for “*the germ cell of socialism to grow [in Russia], it required several essential ingredients. One was peace. The new workers’ state could not establish a thriving democracy so long as it was forced to raise an army and wage war to defend itself*” is simply incredible. It also raises an important question with regards Leninist ideas. If the Bolshevik political and organisational form cannot survive during a period of disruption and complicated circumstances then it is clearly a theory to be avoided at all costs.

Therefore, in practice, Leninism has proven to be profoundly anti-democratic. As we argue in sections 13 and 14 this is due to their politics — the creation of a “*strong government and centralism*” will inevitably lead to a new class system being created [Lenin, **Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 75] This is not necessarily because Leninists seek dictatorship for themselves. Rather it is because of the nature of the state machine. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

*“Anarchist critics of Marx pointed out with considerable effect that any system of representation would become a statist interest in its own right, one that at best would work against the interests of the working classes (including the peasantry), and that at worst would be a dictatorial power as vicious as the worst bourgeois state machines. Indeed, with political power reinforced by economic power in the form of a nationalised economy, a ‘workers’ republic’ might well prove to be a despotism (to use one of Bakunin’s more favourite terms) of unparalleled oppression.”*

He continues:

*“Republican institutions, however much they are intended to express the interests of the workers, necessarily place policy-making in the hands of deputies and categorically do not constitute a ‘proletariat organised as a ruling class.’ If public policy, as distinguished from administrative activities, is not made by the people mobilised into assemblies and confederally co-ordinated by agents on a local, regional, and national basis, then a democracy in the precise sense of the term does not exist. The powers that people enjoy under such circumstances can be usurped without difficulty... [I]f the people are to acquire real power over their lives and society, they must establish — and in the past they have, for brief periods of time established — well-ordered institutions in which they themselves directly formulate the policies of their communities and, in the case of their regions, elect confederal functionaries, revocable and strictly controllable, who will*



*execute them. Only in this sense can a class, especially one committed to the abolition of classes, be mobilised as a class to manage society.*" [The Communist Manifesto: Insights and Problems]

This is why anarchists stress direct democracy (self-management) in free federations of free associations. It is the only way to ensure that power remains in the hands of the people and is not turned into an alien power above them. Thus Marxist support for statist forms of organisation will inevitably undermine the liberatory nature of the revolution. Moreover, as indicated in section 14, their idea of the party being the "vanguard" of the working class, combined with its desire for centralised power, makes the dictatorship of the party over the proletariat inevitable.

## 9. Why is McNally wrong on the relation of syndicalism to anarchism?

After slandering anarchism, McNally turns towards another form of libertarian socialism, namely syndicalism. It is worth quoting him in full as his comments are truly ridiculous. He states that there is *"another trend which is sometimes associated with anarchism. This is syndicalism. The syndicalist outlook does believe in collective working class action to change society. Syndicalists look to trade union action — such as general strikes — to overthrow capitalism. Although some syndicalist viewpoints share a superficial similarity with anarchism — particularly with its hostility to politics and political action — syndicalism is not truly a form of anarchism. By accepting the need for mass, collective action and decision-making, syndicalism is much superior to classical anarchism."*

What is ridiculous about McNally's comments is that all serious historians who study the links between anarchism and syndicalism agree that **Bakunin** (for want of a better expression) is the father of syndicalism (see section J.3.8 — indeed, many writers point to syndicalist aspects in Proudhon's ideas as well but here we concentrate on Bakunin)! Bakunin looked to trade union action (including the general strike) as the means of overthrowing capitalism and the state. Thus Arthur Lehning's comment that *"Bakunin's collectivist anarchism ... ultimately formed the ideological and theoretical basis of anarcho-syndicalism"* is totally true and indicative. ["Introduction", **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 29] As is Rudolf Rocker's:

*"Modern Anarcho-syndicalism is a direct continuation of those social aspirations which took shape in the bosom of the First International and which were best understood and most strongly held by the libertarian wing of the great workers' alliance."* [Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 49]

Little wonder, then, we discover Caroline Cahm pointing out *"the basic syndicalist ideas of Bakunin"* and that he *"argued that trade union organisation and activity in the International [Working Men's Association] were important in the building of working-class power in the struggle against capital ... He also declared that trade union based organisation of the International would not only guide the revolution but also provide the basis for the organisation of the society of the future."* Indeed, he *"believed that trade unions had an essential part to play in the developing of revolutionary capacities of the workers as well as building up the organisation of the masses for revolution."* [Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism, p. 219, p. 215 and p. 216] Cahm quotes Bakunin on the role of the general strike:

*“When strikes spread by contagion, it is because they are close to becoming a general strike, and a general strike in view of the ideas of emancipation which hold sway over the proletariat, can only lead to a cataclysm which would make society start a new life after shedding its old skin.” [Op. Cit., p. 217]*

Or George R. Esenwein’s comment that syndicalism *“had deep roots in the Spanish libertarian tradition. It can be traced to Bakunin’s revolutionary collectivism.”* He also notes that the class struggle was *“central to Bakunin’s theory.”* [Op. Cit., p. 209 and p. 20]

Perhaps, in the face of such evidence (and the writings of Bakunin himself), Marxists like McNally could claim that the sources we quote are either anarchists or “sympathetic” to anarchism. To counter this we will quote Marx and Engels. According to Marx Bakunin’s theory consisted of urging the working class to *“only organise themselves by trades-unions”* and *“not occupy itself with politics.”* Engels asserted that in the *“Bakuninist programme a general strike is the lever employed by which the social revolution is started”* and that they admitted *“this required a well-formed organisation of the working class”* (i.e. a trade union federation). [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 48, p. 132 and p. 133] Ignoring the misrepresentations of Marx and Engels about the theories of their enemies, we can state that they got the basic point of Bakunin’s ideas — the centrality of trade union organisation and struggle as well as the use of strikes and the general strike.

(As an aside, ironically enough, Engels distorted diatribe against Bakunin and the general strike was later used against more radical Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg — usually claimed by Leninists as part of their tradition — by the reformists in Social Democratic Parties. For orthodox Marxists, the mass strike was linked to anarchism and Engels had proven that only political action — i.e. electioneering — could lead to working class emancipation.)

Thus, according to McNally, *“syndicalism”* (i.e. Bakunin’s ideas) is *“much superior to classical anarchism”* (i.e. Bakunin’s ideas)! How spurious McNally’s argument actually is can be seen from his comments about syndicalism and its relation to anarchism.

## 10. Do syndicalists reject working class political action?

His last argument against syndicalism is equally flawed. He states that *“by rejecting the idea of working class political action, syndicalism has never been able to give real direction to attempts by workers to change society.”* However, syndicalists (like all anarchists) are clear what kind of politics they reject — bourgeois politics (i.e. the running of candidates in elections). It is worth quoting Rudolf Rocker at length on McNally’s claim:

*“It has often been charged against Anarcho-Syndicalism that it has no interest in the political structure of the different countries, and consequently no interest in the political struggles of the time, and confines its activities to the fight for purely economic demands. This idea is altogether erroneous and springs either from outright ignorance or wilful distortion of the facts. It is not the political struggle as such which distinguishes the Anarcho-Syndicalists from the modern labour parties, both in principle and in tactics, but the form of this struggle and the aims which it has in view...”*

*“The attitude of Anarcho-Syndicalism toward the political power of the present-day state is exactly the same as it takes toward the system of capitalist exploitation... [and so]*

*Anarcho-Syndicalists pursue the same tactics in their fight against that political power which finds its expression in the state...*

*"For just as the worker cannot be indifferent to the economic conditions of his life in existing society, so he cannot remain indifferent to the political structure of his country... It is, therefore, utterly absurd to assert that the Anarcho-Syndicalists take no interest in the political struggles of the time... But the point of attack in the political struggle lies, not in the legislative bodies, but in the people... If they, nevertheless, reject any participation in the work of bourgeois parliaments, it is not because they have no sympathy with political struggles in general, but because they are firmly convinced that parliamentary activity is for the workers the very weakest and the most hopeless form of the political struggle..."*

*"But, most important of all, practical experience has shown that the participation of the workers in parliamentary activity cripples their power of resistance and dooms to futility their warfare against the existing system..."*

*"Anarcho-Syndicalists, then, are not in any way opposed to the political struggle, but in their opinion this struggle, too, must take the form of direct action, in which the instruments of economic power which the working class has at its command are the most effective..."*

*"The focal point of the political struggle lies, then, not in the political parties, but in the economic fighting organisations of the workers. It is the recognition of this which impelled the Anarcho-Syndicalists to centre all their activity on the Socialist education of the masses and on the utilisation of their economic and social power. Their method is that of direct action in both the economic and the political struggles of the time. That is the only method which has been able to achieve anything at all in every decisive moment in history." [Op. Cit., pp. 63–66]*

Rocker's work, **Anarcho-Syndicalism**, was written in 1938 and is considered the standard introduction to that theory. McNally wrote his pamphlet in the 1980s and did not bother to consult the classic introduction to the ideas he claims to be refuting. That in itself indicates the worth of his pamphlet and any claims it has for being remotely accurate with respect to anarchism and syndicalism.

Thus syndicalists **do** reject working class "*political action*" only if you think "*political action*" means simply bourgeois politics — that is, electioneering, standing candidates for Parliament, local town councils and so on. It does not reject "*political action*" in the sense of direct action to effect political changes and reforms. As syndicalists Ford and Foster argue, syndicalists use "*the term 'political action' ... in its ordinary and correct sense. Parliamentary action resulting from the exercise of the franchise is political action. Parliamentary action caused by the influence of direct action tactics ... is not political action. It is simply a registration of direct action.*" They also note that syndicalists "*have proven time and again that they can solve the many so-called political questions by direct action.*" [Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster, **Syndicalism**, p. 19f and p. 23]

A historian of the British syndicalist movement reiterates this point:

*"Nor did syndicalists neglect politics and the state. Revolutionary industrial movements were on the contrary highly 'political' in that they sought to understand, challenge*

*and destroy the structure of capitalist power in society. They quite clearly perceived the oppressive role of the state whose periodic intervention in industrial unrest could hardly have been missed.”* [Bob Holton, **British Syndicalism: 1900–1914**, pp. 21–2]

As we argued in section J.2.10, anarchist support for direct action and opposition to taking part in elections does not mean we are “apolitical” or reject political action. Anarchists have always been clear — we reject “political action” which is bourgeois in nature in favour of “political action” based on the organisations, action and solidarity of working class people. This is because electioneering corrupts those who take part, watering down their radical ideas and making them part of the system they were meant to change.

And history has proven the validity of our anti-electioneering ideas. For example, as we argue in section J.2.6, the net result of the Marxists use of electioneering (“political action”) was the de-radicalising of their movement and theory and its becoming yet another barrier to working class self-liberation. Rather than syndicalism not giving “*real direction to attempts by workers to change society*” it was Marxism in the shape of Social Democracy which did that. Indeed, at the turn of twentieth century more and more radicals turned to Syndicalism and Industrial Unionism as the means of by-passing the dead-weight of Social Democracy (i.e. orthodox Marxism), its reformism, opportunism and its bureaucracy. As Lenin once put it, anarchism “*was not infrequently a kind of penalty for the opportunist sins of the working-class movement.*” [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 305]

Lenin’s claim that anarchist and syndicalist support in the working class is the result of the opportunist nature of the Social Democratic Parties has an element of truth. Obviously militants sick to death of the reformist, corrupt and bureaucratic “working class” parties will seek a revolutionary alternative and find libertarian socialism.

However, Lenin seeks to explain the symptoms (opportunism) and not the disease itself (Parliamentarianism). Nowhere does Lenin see the rise of “opportunist” tendencies in the Marxist parties as the result of the tactics and organisational struggles they used. Indeed, Lenin desired the new Communist Parties to practice electioneering (“political action”) and work within the trade unions to capture their leadership positions. Anarchists rather point out that given the nature of the means, the ends surely follow. Working in a bourgeois environment (Parliament) will result in bourgeoisifying and de-radicalising the party. Working in a centralised environment will empower the leaders of the party over the members and lead to bureaucratic tendencies.

In other words, as Bakunin predicted, using bourgeois institutions will corrupt “revolutionary” and radical parties and tie the working class to the current system. Lenin’s analysis of anarchist influence as being the off-spring of opportunist tendencies in mainstream parties may be right, but if so its a natural development as the tactics supported by Marxists inevitably lead to opportunist tendencies developing. Thus, what Lenin could not comprehend was that opportunism was the symptom and electioneering was the disease — using the same means (electioneering) with different parties/individuals (“Communists” instead of “Social Democrats”) and thinking that opportunism would not return was idealistic nonsense in the extreme.

## 11. Why is McNally's claim that Leninism supports working class self-emancipation wrong?

McNally claims that Marx “was the first major socialist thinker to make the principle of self-emancipation — the principle that socialism could only be brought into being by the self-mobilisation and self-organisation of the working class — a fundamental aspect of the socialist project.” This is not entirely true. Proudhon in 1848 had argued that “the proletariat must emancipate itself without the help of the government.” [quoted by George Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography*, p. 125] This was because the state “finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat.” [Proudhon, *System of Economical Contradictions*, p. 399] Thus, working class people must organise themselves for their own liberation:

*“it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave.”* [Op. Cit., p. 398]

While Proudhon placed his hopes in reformist tendencies (such as workers' co-operatives and mutual banks) he clearly argued that “the proletariat must emancipate itself.” Marx's use of the famous expression — “the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself” — dates from 1865, 17 years after Proudhon's comment that “the proletariat must emancipate itself.” As K. Steven Vincent correctly summarises:

*“Proudhon insisted that the revolution could only come from below, through the action of the workers themselves.”* [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism, p. 157]

Indeed, as Libertarian Marxist Paul Mattick points out, Marx was not even the first person to use the expression “the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.” Flora Tristan used it in 1843. [Marx and Keynes, p. 333] Thus a case could be made that Marx was, in fact, the **third** “major socialist thinker to make the principle of self-emancipation — the principle that socialism could only be brought into being by the self-mobilisation and self-organisation of the working class — a fundamental aspect of the socialist project.”

Similarly, Bakunin continually quoted Marx's (and so Tristan's) words from the Preamble to the General Rules of the First International — “That the emancipation of the workers must be accomplished by the workers themselves.” [The Basic Bakunin, p. 92] Far more than Marx, Bakunin argued that workers' can only free themselves by a “single path, that of **emancipation through practical action**” namely “workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses” by trades unions and solidarity. The “collective experience” workers gain in the International combined with the “collective struggle of the workers against the bosses” will ensure workers “will necessarily come to realise that there is an irreconcilable antagonism between the henchmen of reaction and [their] own dearest human concerns. Having reached this point, [they] will recognise [themselves] to be a revolutionary socialist.” [Op. Cit., p. 103] In contrast Marx placed his hopes for working class self-emancipation on a political party which would conquer “political power.” As history soon proved, Marx was mistaken — “political power” can only be seized by a minority (i.e. the party, **not** the class it claims to represent) and if the few have the power, the rest are no

longer free (i.e. they no longer govern themselves). That the many elect the few who issue them orders does **not** signify emancipation!

However, this is beside the point. McNally proudly places his ideas in the Leninist tradition. It is thus somewhat ironic that McNally claims that Marxism is based on self-emancipation of the working class while claiming Leninism as a form of Marxism. This is because Lenin explicitly stated the opposite, namely that the working class **could not** liberate itself by its own actions. In **What is to be Done?** Lenin argued that *"the working class, exclusively by their own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness ... The theory of socialism [i.e. Marxism], however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals ... the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia."* This meant that *"Social Democratic [i.e. socialist] consciousness ... could only be brought to them from without."* [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 74–5]

Thus, rather than believe in working class self-emancipation, Lenin thought the opposite. Without the radical bourgeois to provide the working class with "socialist" ideas, a socialist movement, let alone society, was impossible. Hardly what you would consider self-emancipation. Nor is this notion of working class passivity confined to the "early" Lenin of **What is to Be Done?** infamy. It can be found in his apparently more "libertarian" work **The State and Revolution**.

In that work he argues *"we do not indulge in 'dreams' of dispensing at once ... with all subordination; these anarchist dreams ... are totally alien to Marxism ... we want the socialist revolution with human nature as it is now, with human nature that cannot dispense with subordination, control and 'managers'"* [Op. Cit., p. 307] No where is the notion that working class people, during the process of mass struggle, direct action and revolution, **revolutionises themselves** (see sections A.2.7 and J.7.2, for example). Instead, we find a vision of people as they are under capitalism (*"human nature as it is now"*) and no vision of self-emancipation of the working class and the resulting changes that implies for those who are transforming society by their own action.

Perhaps it will be argued that Lenin sees *"subordination"* as being *"to the armed vanguard of all the exploited ... i.e., to the proletariat"* [Ibid.] and so there is no contradiction. However, this is not the case as he confuses the rule of the party with the rule of the class. As he states *"[w]e cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions."* [Op. Cit., p. 306] Thus *"subordination"* is **not** to the working class itself (i.e. direct democracy or self-management). Rather it is the *"subordination"* of the majority to the minority, of the working class to "its" representatives. Thus we have a vision of a "socialist" society in which the majority have not revolutionised themselves and are subordinated to their representatives. Such a subordination, however, ensures that a socialist consciousness **cannot** develop as only the **process** of self-management generates the abilities required for self-management (as Malatesta put it, *"[o]nly freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom."* [Life and Ideas, p. 59]).

Therefore McNally's comments that Leninism is a valid expression of Marx's idea of proletarian self-emancipation is false. In reality, Lenin rejected the idea that working class people can emancipate themselves and, therefore, any claim that this tradition stands for proletarian self-emancipation is false. Rather Leninism, for all its rhetoric, has no vision of working class self-activity leading to self-liberation — it denies it can happen and that is why it stresses the role of the party and its need to take centralised power into its own hands (of course, it never en-

tered Lenin's mind that if bourgeois ideology imposes itself onto the working class it also imposes itself on the party as well — more so as they are bourgeois intellectuals in the first place).

While anarchists are aware of the need for groups of like minded individuals to influence the class struggle and spread anarchist ideas, we reject the idea that such ideas have to be “injected” into the working class from outside. Rather, as we argued in section J.3, anarchist ideas are developed within the class struggle by working people themselves. Anarchist groups exist because we are aware that there is an uneven development of ideas within our class and to aid the spreading of libertarian ideas it is useful for those with those ideas to work together. However, being aware that our ideas are the product of working class life and struggle we are also aware that we have to learn from that struggle. It is because of this that anarchists stress self-management of working class struggle and organisation from below. Anarchists are (to use Bakunin's words) “*convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction.*” [Michael Bakunin: *Selected Writings*, p. 237] Only when this happens can new ways of life be created and truly develop freely. It also explains anarchist opposition to political groups seizing power — that will only result in old dogmas crushing the initiative of people in struggle and the new forms of life they create. That is why anarchists stress the importance of revolutionaries using “*natural influence*” (i.e. arguing their ideas in popular organisations and convincing by reason) — doing so allows new developments and ideas to be expressed and enriched by existing ones and vice versa.

One last point. It could be argued that Lenin's arguments were predated by Marx and Engels and so Marxism as such rather than just Leninism does not believe in proletarian self-emancipation. This is because they wrote in *The Communist Manifesto* that “*a portion of the bourgeois goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole.*” They also note that the Communists are “*the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties ... [and] they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the general results of the proletarian movement.*” [Selected Works, p. 44 and p. 46] Thus a portion of the bourgeois comprehend “*the historical movement as a whole*” and this is also the “*advantage*” of the Communist Party over “*the great mass of the proletariat.*” Perhaps Lenin's comments are not so alien to the Marxist tradition after all.

## 12. Why is Marxist “class analysis” of anarchism contradictory?

Another ironic aspect of McNally's pamphlet is his praise for the Paris Commune and the Russian Soviets. This is because key aspects of both revolutionary forms were predicted by Proudhon and Bakunin.

For example, McNally's and Marx's praise for revocable mandates in the Commune was advocated by Proudhon in 1840s and Bakunin in 1860s (see sections 4 and 5). Similarly, the Russian Soviets (a federation of delegates from workplaces) showed a marked similarity with Bakunin's discussions of revolutionary change and the importance of industrial associations being the basis of the future socialist commune (as he put it, the “*future organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by free association or free federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then*

*in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.*" [Michael Bakunin: *Selected Writings*, p. 206]).

Indeed, the Paris Commune (in both its economic and political aspects) showed a clear inspiration from Proudhon's works. In the words of George Woodcock, there are "*demands in the Commune's Manifesto to the French People of the 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1871, that might have been written by Proudhon himself.*" [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: *A Biography*, p. 276] K. Steven Vincent also points out that the declaration "*is strongly federalist in tone [one of Proudhon's favourite ideas], and it has a marked proudhonian flavour.*" [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism, p. 232] Moreover, the desire to replace wage labour with associated labour by the creation of co-operatives expressed during the Commune clearly showed the influence of Proudhon (see section A.5.1 for more details). As Marx mentions the "*rough sketch of national organisation*" produced by the Commune it is useful to quote the Commune's declaration in order to show clearly its anarchist roots and tendencies:

*"The absolute autonomy of the Commune extended to all districts of France ... to every Frenchman the full exercise of his faculties and aptitudes, as man, citizen, and worker.*

*"The autonomy of the Commune shall have no limits other than the right of autonomy equally enjoyed by all other communes adhering to the contract, and by whose association together French Unity will be preserved... Selection by ballot ... with the responsibility and permanent right of control and dismissal of magistrates and all communal civil servants of all grades ... Permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs by the free expression of their ideas. Organisation of urban defence and of the National Guard, which elects its leaders ...the large central administration delegated by the federation of communes shall adopt and put into practice these same principles.*

*"The Unity which has been imposed on us up to now ... is nothing but despotic centralisation ... The Political Unity which Paris desires is the voluntary association of all local initiatives ...*

*"The Communal Revolution ... spells the end of the old world with its governments and its clerics, militarism, officialdom, exploitation, stock-jobbing, monopolies, and privileges, to which the proletariat owes its servitude, the country its ills and its disasters."* ["*Declaration to the French People*"], contained in David Thomson (ed.), **France: Empire and Republic, 1850–1940**, pp. 186–7]

The links with Proudhon's ideas cannot be clearer. Both Proudhon and the Commune stressed the importance of decentralisation of power, federalism, the end of both government and exploitation and so on. Moreover, in his letter to Albert Richard, Bakunin predicted many aspects of the Paris Commune and its declaration (see **Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 177–182).

Little wonder few Marxists (nor Marx himself) directly quote from this declaration. It would be difficult to attack anarchism (as "petty-bourgeois") while proclaiming the Paris Commune as the first example of "*the dictatorship of the Proletariat.*" The decentralised, federalist nature of the Commune cannot be squared with the usual Marxist instance on centralisation and the claim that federalism "*as a principle follows logically from the petty-bourgeois views of anarchism. Marx was a centralist.*" [Lenin, "*The State and Revolution*", Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 273]



Given that Marx described the Commune as “*essentially a working-class government*” and as “*the political form, at last discovered, under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour,*” it is strange that McNally terms Proudhon’s and Bakunin’s ideas as those of the past. [Selected Writings, p. 290] In actuality, as can be seen from the Paris Commune and the soviets, they were the ideas of the future — and of working class self-liberation and self-organisation. And ones that Marx and his followers paid lip service to.

(We say lip service for Lenin quoted Marx’s statement that the future proletarian state, like the Paris Commune, would abolish the distinction between executive and administrative powers but did not honour it. Immediately after the October Revolution the Bolsheviks established an executive power above the soviets, namely the Council of People’s Commissars. Those who quote Lenin’s *State and Revolution* as proof of his democratic nature usually fail to mention this little fact. In practice that work was little more than an election manifesto to be broken as required.)

Perhaps it could be argued that, in fact, the Paris Commune was the work of artisans. This does have an element of truth in it. Marx stated in 1866 that the French workers were “*corrupted*” by “*Proudhonist*” ideas, “*particularly those of Paris, who as workers in luxury trades are strongly attached, without knowing it [!], to the old rubbish.*” [Marx, Engels and Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism*, pp. 45–6] Five years later, these workers (still obviously influenced by “*the old rubbish*”) created “*the political form*” of “*the economic emancipation of labour.*” How can the Paris Commune be the “*Dictatorship of the Proletariat*” (as Engels claimed [Selected Writings, p. 259]) when 35 members of the Commune’s council were artisans and only 4 or 5 were industrial workers (i.e. proletarians)?

Can the fact that artisans were, according to McNally and Marx, social strata of the past, were backward looking, etc. be reconciled with the claim that the Paris Commune was the political form of proletarian emancipation? No, not from a Marxist class analysis. Hence Marxists ignoring the real nature of the Parisian working class when discussing the commune. However, from an anarchist perspective — which sees the artisan, peasant and proletariat forming a common class of working people — the development of the Paris Commune is no surprise. It is the work of people seeking to end wage labour and the threat of wage labour now rather than sometime in the future once capitalism has fully developed. Thus McNally’s (and Marx’s) support for the Commune makes a mockery of his attacks on anarchism as the theory of the artisans and peasants for it was the artisans who created the first model of their “*proletarian*” state!

As indicated, McNally’s arguments do not hold water. Ironically, if anarchism was the death-cry of the artisan and peasant then it is strange, to say the least, that this theory so influenced the Paris Commune which McNally praises so much. We therefore suggest that rather than being a backward-looking cry of despair for those disappearing under the wheels of rising capitalism, anarchism was in fact a theory developed from the struggles and self-activity of those currently suffering capitalist and state oppression — namely the artisans, peasants and industrial proletariat (i.e. the working class as a whole). In other words, it is a philosophy and theory for the future, not of the past. This can be seen from the libertarian aspects of the Paris Commune, aspects Marx immediately tried to appropriate for his own theories (which, unfortunately, were swamped by the authoritarian elements that existing already).

And one last point, McNally claims that Marx “*immediately rallied to the cause of the Paris Commune.*” This is not true. As John Zerzan points out “[d]ays after the successful insurrection began he failed to applaud its audacity, and satisfied himself with grumbling that ‘it had no chance of success.’ Though he finally recognised the fact of the Commune (and was thereby forced to revise

his reformist ideas regarding proletarian use of existing state machinery), his lack of sympathy is amply reflected by the fact that throughout the Commune's two-month existence, the General Council of the International spoke not a single word about it ... his *Civil War in France* constitutes an obituary." [Elements of Refusal, p. 126] Perhaps the delay was due to Marx wondering how Parisian artisans had become the vanguard of the proletariat overnight and how he could support a Commune created by the forces of the past?

In addition the "old rubbish" the Parisian workers supported was very much ahead of its time. In 1869 the delegate of the Parisian Construction Workers' Trade Union argued that "[a]ssociation of the different corporations [labour unions] on the basis of town or country ... leads to the commune of the future ... Government is replaced by the assembled councils of the trade bodies, and by a committee of their respective delegates." In addition, "a local grouping which allows the workers in the same area to liaise on a day to day basis" and "a linking up of the various localities, fields, regions, etc." (i.e. international trade or industrial union federations) would ensure that "labour organises for present and future by doing away with wage slavery." [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 184] Such a vision of workers' councils and associated labour has obvious similarities with the spontaneously created soviets of the 1905 Russian Revolution. These, too, were based on assembled councils of workers' delegates. Of course they were differences but the basic idea and vision are identical.

Therefore to claim that anarchism represents the past presents Marxists with a few problems given the nature of the Paris Commune and its obvious libertarian nature. If it is claimed that the Parisian artisans defended "not their present, but their future interests" and so "desert[ed] their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat" (the class they are being "transfer[ed]" into by the rise of capitalism) then, clearly, anarchist ideas are "future," proletarian, ideas as it is that class interest artisans serve "[i]f by chance they are revolutionary." [Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 44]

Whichever way you look at it, McNally's claims on the class nature of anarchism do not stand up to close analysis. Proudhon addressed both artisan/peasant and wage slave in his works. He addressed both the past and the present working class. Bakunin did likewise (although with a stronger emphasis on wage slaves). Therefore it is not surprising that Proudhon and Bakunin predicted aspects of the Paris Commune — they were expressing the politics of the future. As is clear from their writings, which still remain fresh today.

This confusion associated with Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism was also present in Lenin. Given that anarchism is apparently associated with the petty-bourgeois we find a strange contradiction in Lenin's work. On the one hand Lenin argued that Russia "despite the more petty-bourgeois composition of her population as compared with the other European countries" had, in fact, "negligible" anarchist influence during the two revolutions of 1905 and 1917. He claimed that this was due to Bolshevism's having "waged a most ruthless and uncompromising struggle against opportunism." [Marx, Engels and Lenin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 305]

On the other he admitted that, in the developed capitalist nations, anarchists and syndicalists were "quite revolutionary and connected with the masses" and that it is "the duty of all Communists to do everything to help all proletarian mass elements to abandon anarchism ... the measure in which genuinely Communist parties succeed in winning mass proletarian elements ... away from anarchism, is a criterion of the success of those Parties." [Op. Cit., pp. 317–8]

Thus, in the most capitalist nations, ones with a more widespread and developed proletariat, the anarchist and syndicalist movements were more firmly developed and had closer connections

with the masses than in Russia. Moreover, these movements were also quite revolutionary as well and should be won to Bolshevism. But anarchism is the politics of the petit-bourgeois and so should have been non-existent in Western countries but widespread in Russia. The opposite was the case, thus suggesting that Lenin's analysis is wrong.

We can point to another explanation of these facts. Rather than the Bolsheviks "*struggle against opportunism*" being the reason why anarchism was "*negligible*" in 1917–18 in Russia (it was not, in fact) but had mass appeal in Western Europe perhaps it was the fact that anarchism was a product of working class struggle in advanced capitalist countries while Bolshevism was a product of **bourgeois** struggle (for Parliament, a liberal republic, etc.) in Tsarist Russia?

Similarly, perhaps the reason why Bolshevism did not develop opportunist tendencies was because it did not work in an environment which encouraged them. After all, unlike the German Social Democrats, the Bolsheviks were illegal for long periods of time and worked in an absolutist monarchy. The influences that corrupted the German SPD were not at work in the Tsarist regime. Thus, Bolshevism, perhaps at best, was applicable to Tsarist conditions and anarchism to Western ones.

However, as noted and contrary to Lenin, Russian anarchism was far from "*negligible*" during 1917–18 and was growing which was why the Bolsheviks suppressed them **before** the start of the civil war. As Emma Goldman noted, a claim such as Lenin's "*does not tally with the incessant persecution of Anarchists which began in [April] 1918, when Leon Trotsky liquidated the Anarchist headquarters in Moscow with machine guns. At that time the process of elimination of the Anarchists began.*" [Trotsky Protests Too Much] This fact of anarchist influence during the revolution does not contradict our earlier analysis. This is because the Russian anarchists, rather than appealing to the petit-bourgeois, were influencing exactly the same workers, sailors and soldiers the Bolsheviks were. Indeed, the Bolsheviks often had to radicalise their activities and rhetoric to counter anarchist influence. As Alexander Rabinowitch (in his study of the July uprising of 1917) notes:

*"At the rank-and-file level, particularly within the [Petrograd] garrison and at the Kronstadt naval base, there was in fact very little to distinguish Bolshevik from Anarchist... The Anarchist-Communists and the Bolsheviks competed for the support of the same uneducated, depressed, and dissatisfied elements of the population, and the fact is that in the summer of 1917, the Anarchist-Communists, with the support they enjoyed in a few important factories and regiments, possessed an undeniable capacity to influence the course of events. Indeed, the Anarchist appeal was great enough in some factories and military units to influence the actions of the Bolsheviks themselves."* [Prelude to Revolution, p. 64]

This is hardly what would be expected if anarchism was "petit-bourgeois" as Marxists assert.

It could, in fact, be argued that the Bolsheviks gained the support of so many working class people (wage slaves) during the summer of 1917 **because they sounded and acted like anarchists** and **not** like Marxists. At the time many considered the Bolsheviks as anarchists and one fellow Marxist (an ex-Bolshevik turned Menshevik) thought Lenin had "*made himself a candidate for one European throne that has been vacant for thirty years — the throne of Bakunin!*" [quoted by Alexander Rabinowitch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 40] As Alexander Berkman argues, the "*Anarchist mottoes proclaimed by the Bolsheviks did not fail to bring results. The masses relied to their flag.*" [What is Communist Anarchism, p. 101]

Moreover, this stealing of anarchist slogans and tactics was **forced** upon the Bolsheviks by the working class. On Lenin's own admission, the masses of peasants and workers were "*a hundred times further to the left*" than the Bolsheviks. Trotsky himself notes that the Bolsheviks "*lagged behind the revolutionary dynamic ... The masses at the turning point were a hundred times to the left of the extreme left party.*" [History of the Russian Revolution, Vol. 1, p. 403f] Indeed, one leading Bolshevik stated in June, 1917 (in response to a rise in anarchist influence), "[b]y fencing ourselves off from the Anarchists, we may fence ourselves off from the masses." [quoted by Alexander Rabinowitch, Op. Cit., p. 102] That, in itself, indicates the weakness of Lenin's class analysis of anarchism.

Rather than seeing the Russian experience refute the claim that anarchism is a working class theory, it reinforces it — the Bolsheviks would not have succeeded if they had used traditional Marxist slogans and tactics. Instead, much to the dismay of their more orthodox comrades, the Bolsheviks embraced traditional anarchist ideas and tactics and thereby gained increased influence in the working class. After the Bolshevik seizure of power in the name of the soviets, anarchist influence increased (see section A.5.4) as more working people recognised that what the Bolsheviks meant by their slogans was different than what working people thought they meant!

Thus the experience of the Russian Revolution re-enforces the fact that Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism fails to convince. Far from proving that libertarian socialism is non-proletariat, that Revolution proved that it was (just as confirmed the prophetic correctness of the views of the founders of anarchism and, in particular, their critique of Marxism).

The usual Marxist "class analysis" of anarchism is somewhat confused. On the one hand, it claims that anarchism is backward looking and the politics of the petit-bourgeois being destroyed by the rise and development of capitalism. On the other hand Marxists point to events and organisations created in working class struggle which were predicted and/or influenced by **anarchist** ideas and ideals, **not** Marxist ones. That indicates better than any other argument that Marxists are wrong about anarchism and their "class analysis" nothing more than distortions and bigotry.

Based on the evidence and the contradictions it provokes in Marxist ideology, we have to argue that McNally is simply wrong. Rather than being an ideology of the petit-bourgeois anarchism is, in fact, a political theory of the working class (both artisans and proletariat). Rather than a backward looking theory, anarchism is a theory of the present and future — it has a concrete and radical critique of current society and a vision of the future and a theory how to get there which appeals to working people in struggle. Such is obviously the case when reading anarchist theory.

### 13. If Marxism is "*socialism from below*," why do anarchists reject it?

McNally claims that Marxism is "*socialism from below*." In his text he indicates support for the Paris Commune and the soviets of the Russian Revolution. He states that the "*democratic and socialist restructuring of society remains ... the most pressing task confronting humanity. And such a reordering of society can only take place on the basis of the principles of socialism from below. Now more than ever, the liberation of humanity depends upon the self-emancipation of the world working class... The challenge is to restore to socialism its democratic essence, its passionate concern with human freedom.*"

So, if this is the case, why the hostility between anarchists and Marxists? Surely it is a question of semantics? No, for while Marxists pay lip-service to such developments of working class self-

activity and self-organisation as workers' councils (soviets), factory committees, workers' control, revocable and mandated delegates they do so in order to ensure the election of their party into positions of power (i.e. the government). Rather than see such developments as working people's **direct** management of their own destinies (as anarchists do) and as a means of creating a self-managed (i.e. free) society, Marxists see them as a means for their party to take over state power. Nor do they see them as a framework by which working class people can take back control of their own lives. Rather, they see them, at best, as typical bourgeois forms — namely the means by which working people can delegate their power to a new group of leaders, i.e. as a means to elect a socialist government into power.

This attitude can be seen from Lenin's perspectives on the Russian soviets. Rather than seeing them as a means of working class self-government, he saw them purely as a means of gaining influence for his party. In his own words:

*“the Party ... has never renounced its intention of utilising certain non-party organisations, such as the Soviets of Workers' Deputies ... to extend Social-Democratic influence among the working class and to strengthen the Social-Democratic labour movement ... the incipient revival creates the opportunity to organise or utilise non-party working-class institutions, such as Soviets ... for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement; at the same time the Social-Democratic Party organisations must bear in mind if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous.”* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 209–10]

Such a perspective indicates well the difference between anarchism and Leninism. Anarchists do not seek power for their own organisations. Rather they see self-managed organisation created by working class people in struggle as a means of eliminating hierarchy within society, of directly involving the mass of people in the decisions that affect them. In other words, as a means of creating the organisations through which people can change both themselves and the world by their own direct action and the managing of their own struggles, lives, communities and workplaces. For Leninists, view working class self-organisation as a means of gaining power for their own party (which they identify with the power of the working class). Mass organisations, which could be schools for self-management and freedom, are instead subjected to an elitist leadership of intellectual ideologues. The party soon substitutes itself for the mass movement, and the party leadership substitutes itself the party.

Despite its radical language, Leninism is totally opposed to the nature of revolt, rebellion and revolution. It seeks to undermine what makes these organisations and activities revolutionary (their tendencies towards self-management, decentralisation, solidarity, direct action, free activity and co-operation) by using them to build their party and, ultimately, a centralised, hierarchical state structure on the corpse of these once revolutionary forms of working class self-organisation and self-activity.

Lenin's view of the soviets was instrumental: he regarded them merely as a means for educating the working class (i.e. of getting them to support the Bolshevik Party) and enlisting them in the service of his party. Indeed, he constantly confused soviet power with party power, seeing the former as the means to the latter and the latter as the key to creating socialism. What is missing from his vision is the idea of socialism as being based on working class self-activity, self-management and self-government (*“Lenin believed that the transition to socialism was guaranteed*

*ultimately, not by the self-activity of workers, but by the 'proletarian' character of state power.*" [A. S. Smith, *Red Petrograd*, pp. 261–2] And the 'proletarian' character of the state was determined by the party in government). And this gap in his politics, this confusion of party with class, which helped undermine the revolution and create the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. Little wonder that by the end of 1918, the Bolsheviks ruled the newly established soviet state entirely alone and had turned the soviets into docile instruments of their party apparatus rather than forms of working class self-government.

For Lenin and other Bolsheviks the party of the proletariat, that is, **their** party, must strive to monopolise political power, if only to safeguard the proletarian character of the revolution. This follows naturally from Lenin's vanguardist politics (see section 11). As the working class people cannot achieve anything bar a trade union consciousness by their own efforts, it would be insane for the Party to let them govern directly. In the words of Lenin:

*"Syndicalism hands over to the mass of non-Party workers ... the management of their industries ... thereby making the Party superfluous... Why have a Party, if industrial management is to be appointed ... by trade unions nine-tenths of whose members are non-Party workers?"* [Op. Cit., pp. 319–20]

*"Does every worker know how to run the state? ... this is not true ... If we say that it is not the Party but the trade unions that put up the candidates and administrate, it may sound very democratic ... It will be fatal for the dictatorship of the proletariat."* [Op. Cit. p. 322]

*"To govern you need an army of steeled revolutionary Communists. We have it, and it is called the Party. All this syndicalist nonsense about mandatory nominations of producers must go into the wastepaper basket. To proceed on those lines would mean thrusting the Party aside and making the dictatorship of the proletariat ... impossible."* [Op. Cit., p. 323]

In other words, giving the proletariat the power to elect their own managers means to destroy the "*dictatorship*" of the proletariat! Lenin clearly places the power of the party above the ability of working people to elect their own representatives and managers. And McNally claims that his tradition aims at "*workers' power*" and a "*direct and active democracy*"!

Lenin's belief that working class people could not liberate themselves (see section 11) explains his continual emphasis on **representative** democracy and centralism — simply put, the party must have power **over** the working class as that class could not be trusted to make the right decisions (i.e. know what its "real" interests were). At best they would be allowed to vote for the government, but even this right could be removed if they voted for the wrong people (see section 8). For Leninists, revolutionary consciousness is not generated by working class self-activity in the class struggle, but is embodied in the party ("*Since there can there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement **the only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology***" [Lenin, *The Essential Works of Lenin*, 82]). The important issues facing the working class are to be determined not by the workers ourselves, but by the leadership of the party, who are the (self appointed) "*vanguard of the proletariat*". The nature of the relationship between the party and the working class is clear, however, we remain incapable of achieving revolutionary consciousness and have to be led by the vanguard.

Russia, Lenin once said, “*was accustomed to being ruled by 150 000 land owners. Why can 240 000 Bolsheviks not take over the task?*” [Collected Works, Vol. 21, p. 336] The idea of socialism as working class self-management and self-government was lost on him — and the possibility **real** socialism was soon lost to the Russian working class when the Tsar was replaced by the autocratic the rule of the Bolshevik Party. “*Workers’ power*” cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party — as it repeatedly was by the Bolsheviks (and Social Democrats before them).

Thus Malatesta’s comments:

*“The important, fundamental dissension [between anarchists and Marxists] is [that] ... [Marxist] socialists are authoritarians, anarchists are libertarians.*

*“Socialists want power ... and once in power wish to impose their programme on the people... Anarchists instead maintain, that government cannot be other than harmful, and by its very nature it defends either an existing privileged class or creates a new one.”* [Life and Ideas, p. 142]

Anarchists seek to influence people by the power of our ideas within popular organisations. We see such organisations as the means by which working people can take control of their own lives and start to create a free, libertarian socialist society. A self-managed society can only be created by self-management, in short, and any tendencies to undermine popular self-management in favour of hierarchical power of a party will subvert a revolution and create an end drastically at odds with the ideals of those who take part in it.

Similarly, anarchists reject the Leninist idea of highly centralised “vanguard” parties. As the anarchists of Trotwatch explain, such a party leaves much to be desired:

*“In reality, a Leninist Party simply reproduces and institutionalises existing capitalist power relations inside a supposedly ‘revolutionary’ organisation: between leaders and led; order givers and order takers; between specialists and the acquiescent and largely powerless party workers. And that elitist power relation is extended to include the relationship between the party and class.”* [Carry on Recruiting!, p. 41]

Such an organisation can never create a socialist society. In contrast, anarchists argue that socialist organisations should reflect as much as possible the future society we are aiming to create. To build organisations which are statist/capitalistic in structure cannot do other than reproduce the very problems of capitalism/statism into them and so undermine their liberatory potential. As Murray Bookchin puts it:

*“The ‘glorious party,’ when there is one, almost invariably lags behind the events ... In the beginning ... it tends to have an inhibitory function, not a ‘vanguard’ role. Where it exercises influence, it tends to slow down the flow of events, not ‘co-ordinate’ the revolutionary forced. This is not accidental. The party is structured along hierarchical lines **that reflect the very society it professes to oppose** ... Its membership is schooled in obedience ... The party’s leadership, in turn, is schooled in habits born of command, authority, manipulation ... Its leaders ... lose contact with the living situation below. The local groups, which know their own immediate situation better than any remote lead-*

ers, are obliged to subordinate their insights to directives from above. The leadership, lacking any direct knowledge of local problems, responds sluggishly and prudently...

*“The party becomes less efficient from a revolutionary point of view the more it seeks efficiency by means of hierarchy, cadres and centralisation. Although everyone marches in step, the orders are usually wrong, especially when events begin to move rapidly and take unexpected turns — as they do in all revolutions. The party is efficient in only one respect — in moulding society in its own hierarchical image if the revolution is successful. It recreates bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the very social conditions which justify this kind of society. Hence, instead of ‘withering away,’ the state controlled by the ‘glorious party’ preserves the very conditions which ‘necessitate’ the existence of a state — and a party to ‘guard’ it.”* [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, pp. 194–198]

As we argue in section J.3, anarchists do not reject the need for political organisations (anarchist groups, federations and so on) to work in mass movements and in revolutionary situations. However, we do reject the Leninist idea of a vanguard party as being totally inappropriate for the needs of a social revolution — a revolution that aims to create a free society.

In addition to this difference in the **political** nature of a socialist society, the role of organisations created in, by and for the class struggle and the nature of socialist organisation, anarchists and Marxists disagree with the **economic** nature of the future society.

McNally claims that in Russia “[c]ontrol of the factories was taken over by the workers” but this is a total distortion of what actually happened. Throughout 1917, it was the workers themselves, **not** the Bolshevik Party, which raised the issue of workers’ self-management and control. As S.A. Smith puts it, the *“factory committees launched the slogan of workers’ control of production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not until May that the party began to take it up.”* [Red Petrograd, p. 154] Given that the defining aspect of capitalism is wage labour, the Russian workers’ raised a clearly socialist demand that entailed its abolition. It was the Bolshevik party, we must note, who failed to raise above a *“trade union conscious”* in this and so many other cases.

In reality, the Bolsheviks themselves hindered the movement of workers trying to control, and then manage, the factories they worked in. As Maurice Brinton correctly argued, *“it is ridiculous to claim — as so many do today — that in 1917 the Bolsheviks really stood for the full, total and direct control by working people of the factories, mines, building sites or other enterprises in which they worked, i.e. that they stood for workers’ self-management.”* [The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control, p. 27] Rather, Lenin identified *“workers’ control”* as something totally different:

*“When we speak of ‘workers control,’ always placing this cry side by side with the dictatorship of the proletariat ... we make clear thereby what State we have in mind ... if we have in mind a proletarian State — that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat — then the workers’ control can become a national, all-embracing, universally realisable, most exact and most conscientious regulating of the production and distribution of goods.”* [Can the Bolsheviks Maintain State Power?, pp. 46–7]

By *“regulation”* Lenin meant the *“power”* to oversee the books, to check the implementation of decisions made by others, rather than fundamental decision making. As he argued, *“the economists, engineers, agricultural experts and so on ... [will] work out plans under the control of*



*the workers' organisations ... We are in favour of centralisation.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 78–9] Thus others would determine the plans, not the workers themselves. As Brinton states, "[n]owhere in Lenin's writings is workers' control ever equated with fundamental decision-taking (i.e. with the **initiation** of decisions) relating to production ... He envisioned a period during which, in a workers state, the bourgeois would still retain the formal ownership and effective management of most of the productive apparatus ... capitalists would be coerced into co-operation. 'Workers' control' was seen as the instrument of this coercion." [Op. Cit., pp. 12–13] In Lenin's own words, "[t]here is no other way ... than ... organisation of really democratic control, i.e. control 'from below,' of the workers and poorest peasants **over** the capitalists." [The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it, p. 33]

Thus the capitalists would remain and wage slavery would continue but workers could "control" those who had the real power and gave the orders (the capitalists were later replaced by state bureaucrats though the lack of effective control remained). In other words, no vision of workers' self-management in production (and so real socialism) and the reduction of "socialism" to a warmed up variation of state capitalism with (in theory, but not in practice) a dash of liberal democracy in the form of "control" of those with the real power by those under them in the hierarchy.

S.A. Smith correctly argues that Lenin's "*proposals ... [were] thoroughly statist and centralist in character*" and that he used "*the term ['workers' control'] in a very different sense from that of the factory committees.*" [Op. Cit., p. 154] That is, he used the same slogans as many workers' but meant something radically different by it. Leninists follow this tradition today, as can be seen from McNally's use of the words "*[c]ontrol of the factories was taken over by the workers*" to refer to situation drastically different from the workers' self-management it implies to most readers.

Given Lenin's lack of concern about the revolutionising of the relations of production (a lack not shared by the Russian workers, we must note) it is hardly surprising that Lenin considered the first task of the Bolshevik revolution was to build state capitalism. "*State capitalism,*" he wrote, "*is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no gaps.*" [Collected Works, vol. 24, p. 259] Hence his support for centralisation and his full support for "*one-man management*" — working class power in production is never mentioned as a necessary condition for socialism.

Little wonder Soviet Russia never progressed beyond state capitalism — it could not as the fundamental aspect of capitalism, wage labour, was never replaced by workers' self-management of production.

Lenin took the viewpoint that socialism "*is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. In other words, Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly **made to benefit the whole people**; by this token it **ceases** to be capitalist monopoly.*" [The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it, p. 37] He had no real notion of workers' self-management of production nor of the impossibilities of combining the centralised state capitalist system with its big banks, monopolies, big business with genuine rank and file control, never mind self-management. As Alexander Berkman correctly argued:

*"The role of industrial decentralisation in the revolution is unfortunately too little appreciated... Most people are still in the thralldom of the Marxian dogma that centralisation is 'more efficient and economical.' They close their eyes to the fact that the alleged 'economy' is achieved at the cost of the workers' limb and life, that the 'efficiency' degrades him to a mere industrial cog, deadens his soul, kills his body. Furthermore, in a system*

*of centralisation the administration of industry becomes constantly merged in fewer hands, producing a powerful bureaucracy of industrial overlords. It would indeed be the sheerest irony if the revolution were to aim at such a result. It would mean the creation of a new master class.” [The ABC of Anarchism, pp. 80–1]*

However, this is what Lenin aimed at. The Leninist “vision” of the future socialist economy is one of a highly centralised organisation, modelled on capitalism, in which, at best, workers can supervise the decisions made by others and “control” those in power. It is a vision of a more democratic corporate structure, with the workers replacing the shareholders. In practice, it would be a new bureaucracy exploiting and oppressing those who do the actual work — as in private capitalism — simply because capitalist economic structures are designed to empower the few over the many. Like the capitalist state, they cannot be used by the working class to achieve their liberation (they are not created for the mass participation that real socialism requires, quite the reverse in fact!).

In contrast, anarchists view the socialist economy as being based on workers’ self-management of production and the workplace turned into an association of equals. Above the individual workplace, federations of factory committees would co-ordinate activities and ensure wide scale co-operation is achieved. Thus anarchists see a **new** form of economic structure developing, one based on workers’ organisations created in the process of struggle **against** capitalism.

In other words, rather than embrace bourgeois notions of “democracy” (i.e. the election of leaders into positions of power) like Marxists do, anarchists dissolve hierarchical power by promoting workers’ self-management and association. While Marxism ends up as state capitalism pure and simple (as can be seen by the experience of Russia under Lenin and then Stalin) anarchism destroys the fundamental social relation of capitalism — wage labour — via association and workers’ self-management of production.

Thus while both Leninists and anarchists claim to support factory committees and “workers’ control” we have decidedly different notions of what we mean by this. The Leninists see them as a means of workers’ to supervise those who have the real power in the economy (and so perpetuate wage slavery with the state replacing the boss). Anarchists, in contrast, see them as a means of expressing workers self-organisation, self-management and self-government — as a means of abolishing wage slavery and so capitalism by eliminating hierarchical authority, in other words. The difference could not be more striking. Indeed, it would be correct to state that the Leninist tradition is not, in fact, socialist as it identifies socialism as the natural development of capitalism and **not** as a new form of economy which will develop **away** from capitalism by means of associated labour and workers’ self-management of production.

In short, anarchists reject both the means and the ends Leninists aim for and so our disagreements with that tradition is far more than semantics.

This does not mean that all members of Leninist parties do not support workers’ self-management in society and production, favour workers’ democracy, actually do believe in working class self-emancipation and so on. Many do, unaware that the tradition they have joined does not actually share those values. It could, therefore, be argued that such values can be “added” to the core Leninist ideas. However, such a viewpoint is optimistic in the extreme. Leninist positions on workers’ self-management, etc., do not “just happen” nor are they the product of ignorance. Rather they are the natural result of those “core” ideas. To add other values to Leninism would be like adding extensions to a house built on sand — the foundations are unsuitable and

any additions would soon fall down. This was what happened during the Russian Revolution — movements from below which had a different vision of socialism came to grief on the rocks of Bolshevik power.

The issue is clear — either you aim for a socialist society and use socialist methods to get there or you do not. Those who do seek a **real** socialism (as opposed to warmed up state capitalism) would be advised to consider anarchism which is truly “*socialism from below*” (see next section).

## 14. Why is McNally’s use of the term “*socialism from below*” dishonest?

McNally argues that Marxism can be considered as “*socialism from below*.” Indeed, that is the name of his pamphlet. However, his use of the term is somewhat ironic for two reasons.

Firstly, this is because the expression “*from below*” was constantly on the lips of Bakunin and Proudhon. For example, in 1848, Proudhon was talking about being a “*revolutionary from below*” and that every “*serious and lasting Revolution*” was “*made from below, by the people.*” A “*Revolution from above*” was “*pure governmentalism,*” “*the negation of collective activity, of popular spontaneity*” and is “*the oppression of the wills of those below.*” [quoted by George Woodcock, **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon**, p. 143] Similarly, Bakunin saw an anarchist revolution as coming “*from below.*” As he put it, “*liberty can be created only by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward.*” [**Statism and Anarchy**, p. 179] Elsewhere he writes that “*future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.*” [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 206]

No such idea is present in Marx. Rather, he saw a revolution as consisting of the election of a socialist party into government. Therefore, the idea of “*socialism from below*” is a distinctly anarchist notion, one found in the works of Proudhon and Bakunin, **not** Marx. It is ironic, given his distorted account of Proudhon and Bakunin that McNally uses their words to describe Marxism!

Secondly, and far more serious for McNally, Lenin dismissed the idea of “*from below*” as not Marxist. As he wrote in 1905 (and using Engels as an authority to back him up) “*the principle, ‘only from below’ is an **anarchist** principle.*” [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 192] In this he followed Marx, who commented that Bakunin’s expression “*the free organisation of the working masses from below upwards*” was “*nonsense.*” [**Op. Cit.**, p. 153] For Lenin, Marxists must be in favour of “*From above as well as from below*” and “*renunciation of pressure also from above is **anarchism***” [**Op. Cit.**, p. 196, p. 189] McNally does not mention “*from above*” in his pamphlet and so gives his account of Marxism a distinctly anarchist feel (while denouncing it in a most deceitful way). Why is this? Because, according to Lenin, “[p]ressure from below is pressure by the citizens on the revolutionary government. Pressure from above is pressure by the revolutionary government on the citizens.” [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 189–90]

In other words, Marxism is based on idea that the government pressuring the citizens is acceptable. Given that Marx and Engels had argued in **The Holy Family** that the “*question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat at the moment **considers** as its aim. The question is **what the proletariat is**, and what, consequent on that **being**, it will be compelled to*

do” the idea of “from above” takes on frightening overtones. [quoted by Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, p. 280] As Murray Bookchin argues:

*“These lines and others like them in Marx’s writings were to provide the rationale for asserting the authority of Marxist parties and their armed detachments over and even against the proletariat. Claiming a deeper and more informed comprehension of the situation then ‘even the whole of the proletariat at the given moment,’ Marxist parties went on to dissolve such revolutionary forms of proletarian organisation as factory committees and ultimately to totally regiment the proletariat according to lines established by the party leadership.” [Op. Cit., p. 289]*

A given ideological premise will lead to certain conclusions in practice — conclusions Lenin and Trotsky were not shy in explicitly stating.

Little wonder McNally fails to mention Lenin’s support for revolutionary action “from above.” As we proved above (in section 8), in practice Leninism substitutes the dictatorship of the party for that of the working class as a whole. This is unsurprising, given its confusion of working class power and party power. For example, Lenin once wrote “*the power of the Bolsheviks — that is, the power of the proletariat*” while, obviously, these two things are different. [*Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?*, p. 102] Trotsky makes the same identification of party dictatorship with popular self-government:

*“We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organisation that the party has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this ‘substitution’ of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class. It is quite natural that, in the period in which history brings up those interests ... the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole.” [Terrorism and Communism, p. 109]*

In this confusion, we must note, they follow Engels who argued that “*each political party sets out to establish its rule in the state, so the German Social-Democratic Workers’ Party is striving to establish its rule, the rule of the working class.*” [Marx, Engels and Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism*, p. 94]

Such confusion is deadly to a true “revolution from below” and justifies the use of repression against the working class — they do not understand their own “*fundamental interests*,” only the party does. Anarchists recognise that parties and classes are different and only self-management in popular organisations from below upwards can ensure that a social revolution remains in the hands of all and not a source of power for the few. Thus “*All Power to the Soviets*,” for anarchists, means **exactly** that — not a euphemism for “*All Power to the Party*.” As Voline made clear:

*“[F]or, the anarchists declared, if ‘power’ really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik Party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets.” [The Unknown Revolution, p. 213]*

Marxist confusion of the difference between working class power and party power, combined with the nature of centralised power and an ideology which claims to “comprehend” the “real” interests of the people cannot help but lead to the rise of a ruling bureaucracy, pursuing “from above” their own power and privileges.

*“All political power inevitably creates a privileged situation for the men who exercise it,”* argued Voline. *“Thus is violated, from the beginning, the equalitarian principle and strikes at the heart of the Social Revolution ... [and] becomes the source of other privileges ... power is compelled to create a bureaucratic and coercive apparatus indispensable to all authority ... Thus it forms a new privileged caste, at first politically and later economically.”* [Op. Cit., p. 249]

Thus the concept of revolution “from above” is one that inevitably leads to a new form of class rule — rule by bureaucracy. This is not because the Bolsheviks were “bad people” — rather it is to do with the nature of centralised power (which by its very nature can only be exercised by the few). As the anarchist Sergen argued in 1918:

*“The proletariat is being gradually enserfed by the state. The people are being transformed into servants over whom there has arisen a new class of administrators — a new class born mainly from the womb of the so-called intelligentsia ... We do not mean to say ... that the Bolshevik party set out to create a new class system. But we do say that even the best intentions and aspirations must inevitably be smashed against the evils inherent in any system of centralised power. The separation of management from labour, the division between administrators and workers flows logically from centralisation. It cannot be otherwise.”* [The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution, pp. 123–4]

Thus McNally’s use of the term “from below” is dishonest on two levels. Firstly, it is of anarchist origin and, secondly, it was repudiated by Lenin himself (who urged revolution “from below” and “from above”, thus laying the groundwork for a new class system based around the Party). It goes without saying that either McNally is ignorant of his subject (and if so, why write a pamphlet on it) or he knew these facts and decided to suppress them.

Either way it shows the bankruptcy of Marxism — it uses libertarian rhetoric for non-libertarian ends while distorting the real source of those ideas. That Lenin dismissed this rhetoric and the ideas behind them as “anarchist” says it all. McNally’s (and the SWP/ISO’s) use of this rhetoric and imagery is therefore deeply dishonest.

## 15. Did Trotsky keep alive Leninism’s “*democratic essence*”?

McNally argues that “[d]uring the terrible decades of the 1920s and 1940s ... the lone voice of Leon Trotsky kept alive some of the basic elements of socialism from below.” He suggests that it “was Trotsky’s great virtue to insist against all odds that socialism was rooted in the struggle for human freedom.”

There is one slight flaw with this argument, namely that it is not actually true. All through the 1920s and 1930s Trotsky, rather than argue for “socialism’s democratic essence”, continually argued for party dictatorship. That McNally asserts the exact opposite suggests that the ideas of anarchism are not the only ones he is ignorant of. To prove our argument, we simply need to provide a chronological account of Trotsky’s actual ideas.

We shall begin in 1920 when we discover Trotsky arguing that:

*“We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the ... party ... [that] the Soviets ... [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this ‘substitution’ of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class.” [Terrorism and Communism, p. 109]*

Of course, this was written during the Civil War and may be excused in terms of the circumstances in which it was written. Sadly for this kind of argument, Trotsky continued to argue for party dictatorship after its end. In 1921, he argued again for Party dictatorship at the Tenth Party Congress. His comments made there against the **Workers’ Opposition** within the Communist Party make his position clear:

*“The Workers’ Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans, making a fetish of democratic principles! They place the workers’ right to elect representatives — above the Party, as if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers’ democracy. It is necessary to create amongst us the awareness of the revolutionary birthright of the party. which is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering even in the working classes. This awareness is for us the indispensable element. The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers’ democracy.”* [quoted by Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 209]

He repeated this call again. In 1922 he stated plainly that *“we maintain the dictatorship of our party!”* [**The First Five Years of the Communist International**, vol. 2, p. 255] Writing in 1923, he argued that *“[i]f there is one question which basically not only does not require revision but does not so much as admit the thought of revision, it is the question of the dictatorship of the Party, and its leadership in all spheres of our work.”* He stressed that *“[o]ur party is the ruling party ... To allow any changes whatever in this field, to allow the idea of a partial ... curtailment of the leading role of our party would mean to bring into question all the achievements of the revolution and its future.”* He indicated the fate of those who **did** question the party’s *“leading role”*: *“Whoever makes an attempt on the party’s leading role will, I hope, be unanimously dumped by all of us on the other side of the barricade.”* [**Leon Trotsky Speaks**, p. 158 and p. 160]

Which, of course, was exactly what the Bolsheviks had done to other socialists (anarchists and others) and working class militants and strikers after they had taken power.

At this point, it will be argued that this was before the rise of Stalinism and the defeat of the Left Opposition. With the rise of Stalin, many will argue that Trotsky finally rejected the idea of party dictatorship and re-embraced what McNally terms the *“democratic essence”* of socialism. Unfortunately, yet again, this argument suffers from the flaw that it is totally untrue.

Let us start with the so-called *“New Course”* of December 1923, in which Trotsky stated that *“[w]e are the only party in the country and, in the period of the dictatorship, it could not be otherwise”* and the Party was *“obliged to monopolise the direction of political life.”* Although, of course, it was *“incontestable that fractions are a scourge in the present situation”* and not to be tolerated. Of

course, there was talk of “workers’ democracy” but the “New Course Resolution” was clear that that term in fact meant only internal party democracy: “Workers’ democracy means the liberty of frank discussion of the most important questions of party life by all members, and the election of all leading party functionaries and commissions”. To confirm this, it explicitly stated that “there can be no toleration of the formation of groupings whose ideological content is directed ... against the dictatorship of the proletariat, as for instance the Workers’ Truth and Workers’ Group.” [**The challenge of the Left Opposition (1923–25)**, p. 87, p. 89 and p. 460] Both these groups explicitly aimed for genuine workers’ democracy and opposed party dictatorship.

Moving on to Left Opposition proper, we see Trotsky opining in 1926 that the “dictatorship of the party does not contradict the dictatorship of the class either theoretically or practically; but is the expression of it, if the regime of workers’ democracy is constantly developed more and more.” [**The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926–27)**, p. 76] The obvious contradictions and absurdities of this assertion are all too plain. Needless to say, when defending the concept of “the dictatorship of the party” he linked it to Lenin (and so to Leninist orthodoxy):

“Of course, the foundation of our regime is the dictatorship of a class. But this in turn assumes ... it is class that has come to self-consciousness through its vanguard, which is to say, through the party. Without this, the dictatorship could not exist ... Dictatorship is the most highly concentrated function of function of a class, and therefore the basic instrument of a dictatorship is a party. In the most fundamental aspects a class realises its dictatorship through a party. That is why Lenin spoke not only of the dictatorship of the class but also the dictatorship of the party and, **in a certain sense**, made them identical.” [Op. Cit., pp. 75–6]

1927 saw Trotsky state that “[w]ith us the dictatorship of the party (quite falsely disputed theoretically by Stalin) is the expression of the socialist dictatorship of the proletariat ... The dictatorship of a party is a part of the socialist revolution”? [**Leon Trotsky on China**, p. 251]

The same year saw the publication of the **Platform of the Opposition**, in which it will soon be discovered that Trotsky **still** did not question the issue of Party dictatorship. Indeed, it is actually stressed in that document. While it urged a “consistent development of a workers’ democracy in the party, the trade unions, and the soviets” and to “convert the urban soviets into real institutions of proletarian power” it contradicted itself by, ironically, attacking Stalin for weakening the party’s dictatorship. In its words, the “growing replacement of the party by its own apparatus is promoted by a ‘theory’ of Stalin’s which denies the Leninist principle, inviolable for every Bolshevik, that the dictatorship of the proletariat is and can be realised only through the dictatorship of the party.” Of course it did not bother to explain how workers’ democracy **could** develop within a party dictatorship nor how soviets could become institutions of power when real power would, obviously, lie with the party. But, then, it did not have to as by “workers’ democracy” the Platform meant inter-party democracy, as can be seen when its authors “affirm” the “New Course Resolution” definition quoted above. [**The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926–7)**, p. 384, p. 395 and p. 402]

It repeated this “principle” by arguing that “the dictatorship of the proletariat demands a single and united proletarian party as the leader of the working masses and the poor peasantry.” It stressed that “[n]obody who sincerely defends the line of Lenin can entertain the idea of ‘two parties’ or play with the suggestion of a split. Only those who desire to replace Lenin’s course with some other can

advocate a split or a movement along the two-party road.” As such: “We will fight with all our power against the idea of two parties, because the dictatorship of the proletariat demands as its very core a single proletarian party. It demands a single party.” [Op. Cit., p. 439 and p. 441]

Trotsky did not change from this perspective even after the horrors of Stalinism which McNally correctly documents. Writing in 1937, ten years after the Platform was published, this point is reiterated in his essay, “Bolshevism and Stalinism” (written in 1937) when argued quite explicitly that “the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard” and that “the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity.” Only with “support of the vanguard by the class” can there be the “conquest of power” and it was in “this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard.” Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the “vanguard” which takes power — “a revolutionary party, even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.” Note, the party is “the sovereign ruler of society,” **not** the working class. Nor can it be said that he was not clear who held power in his system: state power is required to **govern the masses**, who cannot exercise power themselves. As Trotsky put it, “[t]hose who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the Bolshevik leadership were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat.” [Writings 1936–37, p. 490, p. 488 and p. 495] Later that same year he repeated this position:

*“The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history... The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution ... Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the ‘dictatorship’ of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses.”* [Op. Cit., pp. 513–4]

Which was, let us not forget, his argument in 1920! Such remarkable consistency on this point over a 17 year period and one which cannot be overlooked if you seek to present an accurate account of Trotsky’s ideas during this period. Significantly, this was the year after his apparent (and much belated) embrace of soviet democracy in **The Revolution Betrayed**. His advice on what to do during the Spanish Revolution followed this pattern: “Because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship **for themselves** they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship.” [our emphasis, Op. Cit., p. 514] So much for workers’ power!

Two years later, Trotsky repeats the same dictatorial ideas. Writing in 1939, he indicates yet again that he viewed democracy as a threat to the revolution and saw the need for party power over workers’ freedom (a position, incidentally, which echoes his comments from 1921):



*“The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves ... if the dictatorship of the proletariat means anything at all, then it means that the vanguard of the proletariat is armed with the resources of the state in order to repel dangers, including those emanating from the backward layers of the proletariat itself.”* [“The Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism”, pp. 53–66, **Their Morals and Ours**, p. 59]

Needless to say, by **definition** everyone is “backward” when compared to the “vanguard of the proletariat.” Moreover, as it is this “vanguard” which is “armed with the resources of the state” and **not** the proletariat as a whole we are left with one obvious conclusion, namely party dictatorship rather than working class freedom. This is because such a position means denying exactly what workers’ democracy is meant to be all about — namely that working people can recall and replace their delegates when those delegates do not follow the wishes and mandates of the electors. If the governors determine what is and what is not in the “real” interests of the masses and “overcome” (i.e. repress) the governed, then we have dictatorship, not democracy. Clearly Trotsky is, yet again, arguing for party dictatorship and his comments are hardly in the spirit of individual/social freedom or democracy. Rather they mean the promotion of party power over workers’ power — a position which Trotsky had argued consistently throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

As “Left Oppositionist” Victor Serge pointed out, *“the greatest reach of boldness of the Left Opposition in the Bolshevik Party was to demand the restoration of inner-Party democracy, and it never dared dispute the theory of single-party government — by this time, it was too late.”* [**The Serge-Trotsky Papers**, p. 181] Even in the prison camps in the late 1920s and early 1930s, *“almost all the Trotskyists continued to consider that ‘freedom of party’ would be ‘the end of the revolution.’ ‘Freedom to choose one’s party — that is Menshevism,’ was the Trotskyists’ final verdict.”* [Ante Ciliga, **The Russian Enigma**, p. 280] As can be seen, they were simply following their leader — and Bolshevik orthodoxy!

As can be seen, McNally does not present a remotely accurate account of Trotsky’s ideas. All of which makes McNally’s comments deeply ironic. McNally argues that *“Stalin had returned to an ideology resembling authoritarian pre-Marxian socialism. Gone was socialism’s democratic essence. Stalin’s ‘Marxism’ was a variant of socialism from above”* Clearly, Trotsky’s “Marxism” was also a variant of “socialism from above” and without “socialism’s democratic essence” (unless you think that party dictatorship can somehow be reconciled with democracy or expresses one of the “basic elements of socialism from below”). For Trotsky, as for Stalin, the dictatorship of the party was a fundamental principle of Bolshevism and one which was above democracy (which, by its very nature, expresses the “vacillation of the masses”).

Ironically, McNally argues that *“[t]hroughout the 1920s and until his death ... Trotsky fought desperately to build a revolutionary socialist movement based on the principles of Marx and Lenin.”* Leaving Marx to one side for the moment, McNally’s comments are correct. In his support for party power and dictatorship (for a “socialism from above,” to use McNally’s term) Trotsky was indeed following Lenin’s principles. As noted in the last section, Lenin had been arguing from a “socialism” based on “above” and “below” since at least 1905. The reality of Bolshevik rule (as indicated in section 8) showed, pressure “from above” by a “revolutionary” government easily

crushes pressure “from below.” Nor was Lenin shy in arguing for Party dictatorship. As he put it in 1920:

*“the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts ... that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard ... Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transitions from capitalism to communism ... for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation.”* [Collected Works, vol. 32, p. 21]

To stress the point, Lenin is clearly arguing for party power, **not** workers’ power, and that party dictatorship is inevitable in **every** revolution. This position is **not** put in terms of the extreme problems facing the Russian Revolution but rather is expressed in universal terms. As such, in **this** sense, McNally is right — by defending the dictatorship of the party Trotsky was following the “principles” laid down by Lenin.

Despite Lenin and Trotsky’s dismissal of democracy, McNally argues that democracy is the core need of socialism:

*“A workers’ state, according to Marx and Lenin, is a state based upon workers’ control of society. It depends upon the existence of democratic organisation that can control society from below. A workers’ state presupposes that workers are running the state. To talk of a workers’ state is necessarily to talk of workers’ power and workers’ democracy.”*

Which, as far as it goes, is correct (for anarchists, of course, the idea that a state can be run from below is utopian — it is not designed for that and no state has ever been). Sadly for his argument, both Lenin and Trotsky argued against the idea of workers’ democracy and, in stark contrast, argued that the dictatorship of the party was essential for a successful revolution. Indeed, they both explicitly argued against the idea that a mass, democratic organisation could run society during a revolution. The need for party power was raised explicitly to combat the fact that the workers’ could change their minds and vote against the vanguard party. As such, the founding fathers of the SWP/ISO political tradition explicitly argued that a workers’ state had to reject workers power and democracy in order to ensure the victory of the revolution. Clearly, according to McNally’s own argument, Bolshevism cannot be considered as “socialism from below” as it explicitly argued that a workers’ state did not “necessarily” mean workers’ power or democracy.

As indicated above, for the period McNally **himself** selects (the 1920s and 1930s), Trotsky consistently argued that the Bolshevik tradition the SWP/ISO places itself was based on the “principle” of party dictatorship. For McNally to talk about Trotsky keeping “*socialism from below*” alive is, therefore, truly amazing. It either indicates a lack of awareness of Trotsky’s ideas or a desire to deceive.

For anarchists, we stress, the Bolshevik substitution of party power for workers power did not come as a surprise. The state is the delegation of **power** — as such, it means that the idea of a “workers’ state” expressing “workers’ power” is a logical impossibility. If workers **are** running

society then power rests in their hands. If a state exists then power rests in the hands of the handful of people at the top, **not** in the hands of all. The state was designed for minority rule. No state can be an organ of working class (i.e. majority) self-management due to its basic nature, structure and design.

For this reason anarchists from Bakunin onwards have argued for a bottom-up federation of workers' councils as the agent of revolution and the means of managing society after capitalism and the state have been abolished. If these organs of workers' self-management are co-opted into a state structure (as happened in Russia) then their power will be handed over to the **real** power in any state — the government (in this case, the Council of People's Commissars). They will quickly become mere rubberstamps of the organisation which holds the reigns of power, the vanguard party and its central committee.

McNally rewrites history by arguing that it was "*Stalin's counter-revolution*" which saw "*communist militants ... executed, peasants slaughtered, the last vestiges of democracy eliminated.*" The SWP/ISO usually date this "counter-revolution" to around 1927/8. However, by this date there was no "*vestiges*" of meaningful democracy left — as Trotsky himself made clear in his comments in favour of party dictatorship in 1921 and 1923. Indeed, Trotsky had supported the repression of the Kronstadt revolt which had called for soviet democracy (see the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?" for details). He argues that Trotsky "*acknowledged that the soviets had been destroyed, that union democracy had disappeared, that the Bolshevik party had been stripped of its revolutionary character*" under Stalinism. Yet, as we noted in section 8, the Bolsheviks had already destroyed soviet democracy, undermined union democracy and repressed all revolutionary elements outside of the party (the anarchists being first in April 1918). Moreover, as we discussed in section 13, Lenin had argued for the introduction of state capitalism in April 1918 and the appointment of "one-man management." Clearly, by the start of the Russian Civil War in late May 1918, the Bolsheviks had introduced much of which McNally denounces as "Stalinism." By 1921, the repression of the Kronstadt revolt and the major strike wave that inspired it had made Stalinism inevitable (see the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"). Clearly, to draw a sharp distinction between Stalinism and Bolshevism under Lenin is difficult, if not impossible, to make based on McNally's own criteria.

During his analysis of the Trotskyist movements, McNally states that after the second world war "*the Trotskyist movement greeted*" the various new Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and elsewhere "*as workers' states*" in spite of being "*brutally undemocratic state capitalist tyrannies.*" Given that the SWP/ISO and a host of other Leninist groups still argue that Lenin's brutally undemocratic state capitalist tyranny was some kind of "workers' state" McNally's comments seem deeply ironic given the history of Leninism in power. As such, Trotsky's defence of Stalinism as a "*degenerated workers' state*" is not as surprising as McNally tries to claim. If, as he argues, "[t]o talk of a workers' state is necessarily to talk of workers' power and workers' democracy" then Lenin's regime had ceased to be a "workers' state" (if such a thing could exist) by the spring of 1918 at the latest. For anarchists (and libertarian Marxists) the similarities are all too clear between the regime under Lenin and that under Stalin. That McNally cannot see the obvious similarities suggests a lack of objectivity.

He sums up his account of the post-Second War World Trotskyists by arguing that "the movement Trotsky had created fell victim to the ideology of socialism from above." Unfortunately for his claims, this is not the case. As proven above, Trotsky had consistently argued for the dictatorship of the party for 20 years and so Trotskyism had always been based on "*the ideology*

of *socialism from above*.” Trotsky had argued for party dictatorship simply because democratic mass organisations would allow the working class to express their “waving” and “vacillations.” Given that, according to those who follow Bolshevik ideas, the working class is meant to run the so-called “workers’ state” Trotsky’s arguments are extremely significant. He explicitly acknowledged that under Bolshevism the working class does **not** actually manage their own fates but rather the vanguard party does. This is cannot be anything **but** “*socialism from above*.” If, as McNally argues, Trotsky’s “fatal error” in not recognising that Stalinism was state capitalism came from “violating the principles of socialism from below,” then this “fatal error” is at the heart of the Leninist tradition.

As such, its roots can be traced further back than the rise of Stalin. Its real roots lie with the idea of a “workers’ state” and so with the ideas of Marx and Engels. As Bakunin argued at the time (and anarchists have repeated since) the state is, by its nature, a centralised and top-down machine. By creating a “revolutionary” government, power is automatically transferred from the working class into the hands of a few people at the top. As they have the real, **de facto**, power in the state, it is inevitable that they will implement “socialism from above” as that is how the state is structured. As Bakunin argued, “every state ... are in essence only machines governing the masses from above” by a “privileged minority, allegedly knowing the genuine interests of the people better than the people themselves.” The idea of a state being run “from below” makes as much sense as “dry rain.” Little wonder Bakunin argued for a “federal organisation, from the bottom upward, of workers’ associations, groups, city and village communes, and finally of regions and peoples” as “the sole condition of a real and not fictitious liberty.” In other words, “[w]here all rule, there are no more ruled, and there is no State.” [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 211, p. 210 and p. 223] Only this, the destruction of every state and its replacement by a system of workers’ councils, can ensure a real “**socialism from below**.”

Therefore, rather than signifying the working class running society directly, the “workers’ state” actually signifies the opposite — namely, that the working class has delegated that power and responsibility to **others**, namely the government. As Leninism supports the idea of a “workers’ state” then it is inevitably and logically tied to the idea of “socialism from below.” Given that Lenin himself argued that “only from below” was an anarchist principle (see last section), we can easily see what the “fatal error” of Trotsky **actually** was. By rejecting anarchism he automatically rejected real “**socialism from below**.”

Sadly for McNally, Trotsky did not, as he asserts, embrace the “democratic essence” of socialism in the 1920s or 30s. Rather, as is clear from Trotsky’s writings, he embraced party dictatorship (i.e. “*socialism from above*”) and considered this as quite compatible (indeed, an essential aspect) of his Leninist ideology. That McNally fails to indicate this and, indeed, asserts the exact opposite of the facts shows that it is not only anarchism he is ignorant about.

# Marxists and Spanish Anarchism

In this appendix of our FAQ we discuss and reply to various analyses of Spanish anarchism put forward by Marxists, particularly Marxist-Leninists of various shades. The history and politics of Spanish Anarchism is not well known in many circles, particularly Marxist ones, and the various misrepresentations and distortions that Marxists have spread about that history and politics are many. This appendix is an attempt to put the record straight with regards the Spanish Anarchist movement and point out the errors associated with the standard Marxist accounts of that movement, its politics and its history.

Hopefully this appendix will go some way towards making Marxists (and others) investigate the actual facts of anarchism and Spanish anarchist history rather than depending on inaccurate secondary material (usually written by their comrades).

Part of this essay is based on the article “*Trotskyist Lies on Anarchism*” which appeared in **Black Flag** issue no. 211 and Tom Wetzel’s article **Workers’ Power and the Spanish Revolution**.

## 1. Were the Spanish Anarchists “*Primitive Rebels*”?

The thesis that the Spanish Anarchists were “*primitive rebels*,” with a primitive understanding of the nature of revolution is a common one amongst Marxists. One of the main sources for this kind of argument is Eric Hobsbawm’s **Primitive Rebels**, who was a member of the British Communist Party at the time. While the obvious Stalinist nature of the author may be thought enough to alert the intelligent of its political biases, its basic thesis is repeated by many Marxists.

Before discussing Hobsbawm in more detail, it would be useful to refute some of the more silly things so-called serious historians have asserted about Spanish Anarchism. Indeed, it would be hard to find another social or political movement which has been more misrepresented or its ideas and activities so distorted by historians whose attitudes seem more supported by ideological conviction rather than history or investigation of social life.

One of the most common descriptions of Spanish anarchism is that it was “*religious*” or “*millenarian*” in nature. Hobsbawm himself accepts this conceptualisation, along with historians and commentators like Gerald Brenan and Franz Brokenau (who, in fact, did state “*Anarchism is a religious movement*”). Such use of religion was largely due to the influence of Juan Diaz del Moral, a lawyer and historian who was also a landowner. As Jerome R. Mintz points out, “*according to Diaz del Moral, the moral and passionate obreros conscientes [conscious workers — i.e. workers who considered themselves to be anarchists] absorbed in their pamphlets and newspapers were akin to frenzied believers in a new religion.*” [**The Anarchists of Casas Viejas**, p. 5f] However, such a perspective was formed by his class position and privileges which could not help but reflect them:

*“Diaz del Moral ascribed to the campesinos [of Andalusia] racial and cultural stereotypes that were common saws of his class. The sole cause for the waves of rural unrest,*

*Diaz del Moral asserted, could be found in the psychology of the campesinos ... He believed that the Andalusian field workers had inherited a Moorish tendency toward ecstasy and millenarianism that accounted for their attraction to anarchist teaching. Diaz del Moral was mystified by expressions of animosity directed toward him, but the workers considered him to be a *senorito*, a landowner who does not labour ... Although he was both scholarly and sympathetic, Diaz del Moral could not comprehend the hunger and the desperation of the campesinos around him ... To Diaz del Moral, campesino ignorance, passion, ecstasy, illusion, and depression, not having a legitimate basis in reality, could be found only in the roots of their racial heritage.” [Op. Cit., pp. 5–6]*

Hence the “religious” nature of anarchism — it was one of the ways an uncomprehending member of the middle-class could explain working class discontent and rebellion. Unfortunately, this “*explanation*” has become common place in history books (partly reflected academics class interest too and lack of understanding of working class interests, needs and hopes).

As Mintz argues, “*at first glance the religious model seems to make anarchism easier to understand, particularly in the absence of detailed observation and intimate contact. The model was, however, also used to serve the political ends of anarchism’s opponents. Here the use of the terms ‘religious’ and ‘millenarium’ stamp anarchist goals as unrealistic and unattainable. Anarchism is thus dismissed as a viable solution to social ills.*” He continues by arguing that the “*oversimplifications posited became serious distortions of anarchist belief and practice*” (as we shall see). [Op. Cit., p. 5 and p. 6]

Temma Kaplan’s critique of the “religious” view is also worth mentioning. She argues that “*the millenarium theory is too mechanistic to explain the complex pattern of Andalusian anarchist activity. The millenarian argument, in portraying the Andalusian anarchists as fundamentally religious, overlooks their clear comprehension of the social sources of their oppression.*” She concludes that “*the degree of organisation, not the religiosity of workers and the community, accounts for mass mobilisations carried on by the Andalusian anarchists at the end of the nineteenth century.*” She also notes that the “[i]n a secular age, the taint of religion is the taint of irrationality.” [Anarchists of Andalusia: 1868–1903, pp. 210–12 and p. 211] Thus, the Andalusian anarchists had a clear idea who their enemies were, namely the ruling class of the region. She also points out that, for all their revolutionary elan, the anarchists developed a rational strategy of revolution, channelling their energies into organising a trade union movement that could be used as a vehicle for social and economic change. Moreover, as well as a clear idea of how to change society they had a clear vision of what sort of society they desired — one built around collective ownership and federations of workers’ associations and communes.

Therefore the idea that anarchism can be explained in “religious” terms is fundamentally flawed. It basically assumes that the Spanish workers were fundamentally irrational, unable to comprehend the sources of their unhappiness nor able to define their own political goals and tactics and instead looked to naive theories which reinforced their irrationalities. In actuality, like most people, they were sensible, intelligent human beings who believed in a better life and were willing to apply their ideas in their everyday life. That historians apply patronising attitudes towards them says more about the historians than the campesinos.

This uncomprehending attitude to historians can be seen from some of the more strange assertions they make against the Spanish Anarchists. Gerald Brenan, Eric Hobsbawm and Raymond

Carr, for example, all maintained that there was a connection between anarchist strikes and sexual practices. Carr's description gives a flavour:

*"Austere puritans, they sought to impose vegetarianism, sexual abstinence, and atheism on one of the most backward peasantries of Europe ... Thus strikes were moments of exaltation as well as demands for better conditions; spontaneous and often disconnected they would bring, not only the abolition of piece-work, but 'the day,' so near at hand that sexual intercourse and alcohol were abandoned by enthusiasts till it should dawn."*  
[Spain: 1808–1975, p. 444]

Mintz, an American anthropologist who actually stayed with the campesino's for a number of years after 1965, actually asked them about such claims. As he put it, the *"level-headed anarchists were astonished by such descriptions of supposed Spanish puritanism by over-enthusiastic historians."* [Op. Cit., p. 6] As one anarchist put it, *"[o]f course, without any work the husband couldn't provide any food at dinnertime, and so they were angry at each other, and she wouldn't have anything to do with him. In that sense, yes, there were no sexual relations."* [quoted, Op. Cit., p. 7]

Mintz traces the citations which allowed the historians to arrive at such ridiculous views to a French social historian, Angel Maraud, who observed that during the general strike of 1902 in Moron, marriages were postponed to after the promised division of the lands. As Mintz points out, *"as a Frenchman, Maraud undoubtedly assumed that everyone knew a formal wedding ceremony did not necessarily govern the sexual relations of courting couples."* [Op. Cit., p. 6f]

As for abstinence and puritanism, nothing could be further from the truth. As Mintz argues, the anarchists considered alcoholism as being *"responsible for much of the social malaise among many workers ... Excessive drinking robbed the worker of his senses and deprived his family of food. Anarchist newspapers and pamphlets hammered out the evil of this vice."* However, *"[p]roscriptions were not of a puritanical order"* (and so there was no desire to "impose" such things on people) and quotes an anarchist who stated that *"coffee and tobacco were not prohibited, but one was advised against using them. Men were warned against going to a brothel. It was not a matter of morality but of hygiene."* As for vegetarianism, it *"attracted few adherents, even among the obreros conscientes."* [Op. Cit., pp. 86–7 and p. 88]

Moreover, academic mockery of anarchist attempts to combat alcoholism (and **not** alcohol as such) forgets the social context. Being academics they may not have experienced wage labour directly and so do not realise the misery it can cause. People turn to drink simply because their jobs are so bad and seek escape from the drudgery of their everyday lives. As Bakunin argued, *"confined in their life like a prisoner in his prison, without horizon, without outlet ... the people would have the singularly narrow souls and blunted instincts of the bourgeois if they did not feel a desire to escape; but of escape there are but three methods — two chimerical and a third real. The first two are the dram-shop and the church, debauchery of the body or debauchery of the mind; the third is social revolution."* [God and the State, p. 16] So to combat alcoholism was particularly important as many workers turned to alcohol as a means of escaping the misery of life under capitalism. Thus Bookchin:

*"[T]o abstain from smoking, to live by high moral standards, and to especially adjure the consumption of alcohol was very important at the time. Spain was going through her own belated industrial revolution during the period of anarchist ascendancy with all*

*its demoralising features. The collapse of morale among the proletariat, with rampant drunkenness, venereal disease, and the collapse of sanitary facilities, was the foremost problem which Spanish revolutionaries had to deal with ... On this score, the Spanish anarchists were eminently successful. Few CNT workers, much less a committed anarchist, would have dared show up drunk at meetings or misbehave overtly with their comrades. If one considers the terrible working and living conditions of the period, alcoholism was not as serious a problem in Spain as it was in England during the industrial revolution.*" [“Introductory Essay”, **The Anarchist Collectives**, Sam Dolgoff (ed.), pp. xix-xxf]

Mintz sums up by stating “[c]ontrary to exaggerated accounts of anarchist zeal, most thoughtful **obreros conscientes** believed in moderation, not abstinence.” [Op. Cit., p. 88] Unfortunately Mintz’s work, the product of years of living with and talking to the people actually involved in the movement, does not seem to have made much impact on the historians. Unsurprising, really, as history is rarely about the actions, ideas and hopes of working people.

As can be seen, historians seem to delight in misrepresenting the ideas and actions of the Spanish Anarchists. Sometimes, as just seen, the distortions are quite serious, extremely misleading and ensure that anarchism cannot be understood or viewed as a serious political theory (we can understand why Marxists historians would seek this). Sometimes they can be subtle as when Ronald Fraser states that at the CNT’s Saragossa congress in 1936 “*the proposal to create a libertarian militia to crush a military uprising was rejected almost scornfully, in the name of traditional anti-militarism.*” [Blood of Spain, p. 101] Hugh Thomas makes the same claim, stating at “*there was no sign that anyone [at the congress] realised that there was a danger of fascism; and no agreement, in consequence, on the arming of militias, much less the organisation of a revolutionary army as suggested by Juan Garcia Oliver.*” [The Spanish Civil War, p. 181]

However, what Fraser and Thomas omit to tell the reader is that this motion “*was defeated by one favouring the idea of guerrilla warfare.*” [Peter Marshal, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 460] The Saragossa resolution itself stated that a “*permanent army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution ... The armed people will be the best guarantee against all attempts to restore the destroyed regime by interior or exterior forces ... Each Commune should have its arms and elements of defence.*” [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 64]

Fraser’s and Hugh’s omission is extremely serious — it gives a radically false impression of anarchist politics. Their comments could lead a reader to think that anarchists, as Marxists claim, do not believe in defending a revolution. As can be seen from the actual resolutions of the Saragossa conference, this is not the case. Indeed, given that the congress was explicitly discussing, along with many other issues, the question of “*defence of the revolution*” their omission seriously distorts the CNT’s position and anarchist theory. As seen, the congress supported the need to arm the people and to keep those arms under the control of the communes (as well as the role of “*Confederal Defence Forces*” and the efficient organisation of forces on a national level). Given that Thomas quotes extensively from the Saragossa resolution on libertarian communism we can only surmise that he forgot to read the section entitled “**Defence of the Revolution.**”

Hugh and Thomas omissions, however, ensure that anarchism is presented as an utopian and naive theory, unaware of the problems facing society. In reality, the opposite is the case — the Spanish anarchists were well aware of the need to arm the people and resist counter-revolution and fascism by force. Regardless of Thomas’ claims, it is clear that the CNT and FAI realised the danger of fascism existed and passed appropriate resolutions outlining how to organise an



effective means of self-defence (indeed, as early as February 14 of that year, the CNT had issued a prophetic manifesto warning that right-wing elements were ready to provoke a military coup [Murray Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, p. 273]). To state otherwise, while quoting from the document that discusses the issue, must be considered a deliberate lie.

However, to return to our main point — Eric Hobsbawm’s thesis that the Spanish anarchists were an example of “*pre-political*” groups — the “*primitive rebels*” of his title.

Essentially, Hobsbawm describes the Spanish Anarchists — particularly the Andalusian anarchists — as modern-day secular mystics who, like the millenarians of the Middle Ages, were guided by the irrational belief that it was possible to will profound social change. The actions of the Spanish anarchist movement, therefore, can be explained in terms of millenarian behaviour — the belief that it was able to jump start to utopia via an act of will.

The Spanish farm and industrial workers, it is argued, were unable to grasp the complexities of the economic and political structures that dominated their lives and so were attracted to anarchism. According to Hobsbawm, anarchism is marked by “*theoretical primitivism*” and a primitive understanding of revolution and this explained why anarchism was popular with Spanish workers, particularly farm workers. According to Hobsbawm, anarchism told the workers that by spontaneously rising up together they could overthrow the forces of repression and create the new millennium.

Obviously, we cannot refute Hobsbawm’s claims of anarchism’s “*theoretical primitivism*” in this appendix, the reader is invited to consult the main FAQ. Moreover, we cannot stress more that Hobsbawm’s assertion that anarchists believe in spontaneous, overnight uprisings is false. Rather, we see revolution as a **process** in which day-to-day struggle and organisation play a key role — it is not seen as occurring independently of the on-going class struggle or social evolution. While we discuss in depth the nature of an anarchist social revolution in section J.7, we can present a few quotes by Bakunin to refute Hobsbawm’s claim:

*“Revolutions are not improvised. They are not made at will by individuals. They come about through the force of circumstances and are independent of any deliberate ill or conspiracy.”* [quoted by Brian Morris, *Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom*, p. 139]

*“It is impossible to rouse people by artificial means. Popular revolutions are born by the actual force of events ... It is impossible to bring about such a revolution artificially. It is not even possible to speed it up at all significantly ... There are some periods in history when revolutions are quite simply impossible; there are other periods when they are inevitable.”* [Michael Bakunin: *Selected Writings*, p. 183]

As Brian Morris correctly argues, “*Bakunin denies that a social revolution could be made by the will of individuals, independent of social and economic circumstances. He was much less a voluntarist than his Marxist critics make out ... he was ... aware that the social revolution would be a long process that may take many years for its realisation.*” [Bakunin: *The Philosophy of Freedom*, pp. 138–9] To aid the process of social revolution, Bakunin supported the need for “*pioneering groups or associations of advanced workers who were willing to initiate this great movement of self-emancipation.*” However, more is needed — namely popular working class organisations — “*what is the organisation of the masses? ... It is the organisation by professions and trades ... The organisation of the trade sections ... bear in themselves the living seed of the new society which is*

to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself.” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 252 and p. 255]

Therefore, Bakunin saw revolution as a process which starts with day-to-day struggle and creation of labour unions to organise that struggle. As he put it himself:

*“What policy should the International [Workers’ Association] follow during th[e] somewhat extended time period that separates us from this terrible social revolution ... the International will give labour unrest in all countries an **essentially economic** character, with the aim of reducing working hours and increasing salary, by means of the **association of the working masses** ... It will [also] propagandise its principles ... Lastly, the International will expand and organise across frontiers of all countries, so that when the revolution — brought about by the force of circumstances — breaks out, the International will be a real force and will know what it has to do. Then it will be able to take the revolution into its own hands and give it a direction that will benefit the people: an earnest international organisation of workers’ associations from all countries, capable of replacing this departing world of States and bourgeoisie.”* [The Basic Bakunin, pp. 109–10]

However, while quoting Bakunin refutes part of his thesis, Hobsbawm does base his case on some actual events of Spanish Anarchist history. Therefore we need to look at these cases and show how he gets these wrong. Without an empirical basis, his case obviously falls even without quotes by Bakunin. Luckily the important examples he uses have been analysed by people without the ideological blinkers inherent in Leninism.

While we shall concentrate on just two cases — Casa Viejas in 1933 and the Jerez rising of 1892 — a few general points should be mentioned. As Jerome Mintz notes, Hobsbawm’s “account is based primarily on a preconceived evolutionary model of political development rather than on data gathered in field research. The model scales labour movements in accord with their progress toward mass parties and central authority. In short, he explains how anarchosyndicalists were presumed to act rather than what actually took place, and the uprising at Casa Viejas was used to prove an already established point of view. Unfortunately, his evolutionary model misled him on virtually every point.” [Op. Cit., p. 271] We should also note his “model” is essentially Marxist ideology — namely, Marx’s assertion that his aim for mass political parties expressed the interests of the working class and all other visions were the products of sectarians. Mintz also points out that Hobsbawm does not live up to his own model:

*“While Hobsbawm’s theoretical model is evolutionary, in his own treatment anarchism is often regarded as unchanging from one decade to the other. In his text, attitudes and beliefs of 1903–5, 1918–20, 1933, and 1936 are lumped together or considered interchangeable. Of course during these decades the anarchosyndicalists had developed their programs and the individuals involved had become more experienced.”* [Op. Cit., p. 271f]

Hobsbawm believed that Casas Viejas was the classic “anarchist” uprising — “utopian, millenarian, apocalyptic, as all witnesses agree it to have been.” [Primitive Rebels, p. 90] As Mintz states, “the facts prove otherwise. Casas Viejas rose not in a frenzy of blind millenarianism but in response

to a call for a nation-wide revolutionary strike. The insurrection of January 1933 was hatched by faistas [members of the FAI] in Barcelona and was to be fought primarily there and in other urban centres. The uprisings in the countryside would be diversionary and designed to keep the civil guard from shifting reinforcements. The faista plot was then fed by intensive newspaper propaganda, by travelling orators, and by actions undertaken by the [CNT] defence committees. Representatives of the defence committees from Casas Viejas and Medina had received instructions at a regional meeting held days before. On January 11, the anarchosyndicalists of Casas Viejas believed that they were joining their companeros who had already been at the barricades since January 8.” [Op. Cit., p. 272]

Hobsbawm argued that the uprising occurred in accordance with an established economic pattern:

*“Economic conditions naturally determined the timing and periodicity of the revolutionary outbreaks — for instance, social movements tended to reach a peak intensity during the worse months of the year — January to March, when farm labourers have least work (the march on Jerez in 1892 and the rising of Casas Viejas in 1933 both occurred early in January), March-July, when the proceeding harvest has been exhausted and times are lean.”* [Op. Cit., p. 79]

Mintz states the obvious:

*“In reality, most agricultural strikes took place in May and June, the period of the harvest and the only time of the year when the campesinos had any leverage against the landowners. The uprising at Casas Viejas occurred in January precisely because it was **not** an agricultural strike. The timing of the insurrection, hurriedly called to coincide with a planned railway strike that would make it difficult for the government to shift its forces, was determined by strategic rather than economic considerations.”* [Op. Cit., p. 273]

As for the revolt itself, Hobsbawm asserts that:

*“Secure from the outside world, [the men] put up the red and black flag of anarchy and set about dividing the land. They made no attempt to spread the movement or kill anyone.”* [Op. Cit., p. 274]

Which, as Mintz clearly shows, was nonsense:

*“As is already evident, rather than securing themselves from the rest of world, the uprising at Casas Viejas was a pathetic attempt to join in an ill-fated national insurrection. With regard to his second point, there was neither the time nor the opportunity to ‘set about dividing the land.’ The men were scattered in various locations guarding roads and paths leading to the town. There were no meetings or discussions during this brief period of control. Only a few hours separated the shooting at the barracks and the entrance of the small [government] rescue force from Alcala. Contrary to Hobsbawm’s description of peaceful enterprise, at the outset the anarchists surrounding the barracks had fired on the civil guards, mortally wounding two men.”* [Op. Cit., p. 274]

As can be seen, Hobsbawm was totally wrong about the uprising itself and so it cannot be used as evidence for his thesis. On other, less key issues, he was equally wrong. Mintz gives an excellent summary:

*“Since kinship is a key feature in ‘primitive’ societies, according to Hobsbawm, it was a major factor in the leadership of the sindicato [union] in Casas Viejas.*

*“There is no evidence that kinship had anything to do with leadership in the anarchist movement in Casa Viejas or anywhere else. The reverse would be closer to the truth. Since the anarchists expressed belief in universal brotherhood, kinship ties were often undermined. In times of strike or in carrying out any decision of the collective membership, obreros conscientes sometimes had to act counter to their kinship demands in order to keep faith with the movement and with their companeros.*

*“Hobsbawm’s specific examples are unfortunately based in part on errors of fact...*

*“Hobsbawm’s model [also] requires a charismatic leader. Accordingly, the inspired leader of the uprising is said to be ‘old Curro Cruz (‘Six Fingers’) who issued the call for revolution ... ’*

*[...]*

*“This celebration of Seisdedo’s role [‘Six Fingers’], however, ignores the unanimous view of townspeople of every class and political persuasion, who assert that the old man was apolitical and had nothing to do with the uprising ... every observer and participant in the uprising agrees that Seisdedos was not the leader and was never anything other than a virtuous charcoal burner with but a slight interest in anarchosyndicalism.*

*[...]*

*“Should the role of charismatic leader be given to someone else in the town? This was not a case of mistaken identity. No single person in Casas Viejas could lay claim to dominating the hearts and minds of the men...The sindicato was governed by a junta. Among the cast of characters there is no sign of charismatic leadership...” [Op. Cit., pp. 274–6]*

Mintz sums up by stating *“Hobsbawm’s adherence to a model, and the accumulation of misinformation, led him away from the essential conflicts underlying the tragedy and from the reality of the people who participated in it.” [Op. Cit., p. 276]*

The Jerez uprising of 1892 also fails to provide Hobsbawm with any empirical evidence to support his claims. Indeed, as in Casas Viejas, the evidence actually works against him. The actual events of the uprising are as follows. Just before midnight of 8<sup>th</sup> January 1892, several hundred workers entered the town of Jerez crying *“Long live the revolution! Long live Anarchy!”* Armed with only rocks, sticks, scythes and other farm equipment, they marched toward the city jail with the evident intention of releasing its prisoners — who included many political prisoners, victims of the government’s recent anti-anarchist campaign. A few people were killed and the uprising dispersed by a regiment of mounted troops.

Hobsbawm claims this revolt as evidence for his *“primitive rebels”* thesis. As historian George R. Esenwein argues:

*“[T]he Jerez incident cannot be explained in terms of this model. What the millenarian view fails to do in this instance is to credit the workers with the ability to define their own political goals. This is not to deny that there were millenarian aspects of the rising, for the mob action of the workers on the night of 8 January indicates a degree of irrationalism that is consistent with millenarian behaviour. But ... the agitators seem to have had a clear motive in mind when they rose: they sought to release their comrades from the local jail and thereby demonstrate their defiance of the government’s incessant persecution of the International [Workers’ Association] movement. However clumsily and crudely they expressed their grievance, the workers were patently aiming to achieve this objective and not to overthrow the local government in order to inaugurate the birth of a libertarian society.” [Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain: 1868–1898, p. 184]*

Similarly, many Marxists (and liberal historians) point to the “cycle of insurrections” that occurred during the 1930s. They usually portray these revolts as isolated insurrections organised by the FAI who appeared in villages and proclaimed libertarian communism. The picture is one of disorganisation, millenarianism and a belief in spontaneous revolution inspired by a few militants and their daring actions. Nothing could be further from the truth. The “cycle of insurrections” was far more complex than this, as Juan Gomez Casas makes clear:

*“Between 1932 and 1934 ... the Spanish anarchists tried to destroy the existing social order through a series of increasingly violent strikes and insurrections, which were at first spontaneous, later co-ordinated.” [Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI, p. 135]*

Stuart Christie stresses this point when he wrote “[i]t has been widely assumed that the cycle of insurrections which began in ... January 1933 were organised and instigated by the FAI ... In fact the rising had nothing to do with the FAI. It began as an entirely spontaneous local affair directed against a local employer, but quickly mushroomed into a popular movement which threatened to engulf the whole of Catalonia and the rest of Spain ... [CNT militant] Arturo Parera later confirmed that the FAI had not participated in the aborted movement ‘as an organisation.’” [We, the Anarchists, p. 66] While the initial revolts, such as those of the miners of Alto Llobregat in January 1932, were spontaneous acts which caught the CNT and FAI by surprise, the following insurrections became increasingly organised and co-ordinated by those organisations. The January 1933 revolt, as noted above, was based around a planned strike by the CNT railway workers union. The revolt of December 1933 was organised by a National Revolutionary Committee. Both revolts aimed at uprisings all across Spain, based on the existing organisations of the CNT — the unions and their “Defence committees”. Such a degree of planning belies any claims that Spanish Anarchists were “primitive rebels” or did not understand the complexities of modern society or what was required to change it.

Ultimately, Hobsbawm’s thesis and its underlying model represents Marxist arrogance and sectarianism. His model assumes the validity of the Marxist claim that true working class movements are based on mass political parties based on hierarchical, centralised, leadership and those who reject this model and political action (electioneering) are sects and sectarians. It was for this reason that Marx, faced with the increased influence of Bakunin, overturned the First Interna-

tional's original basis of free discussion with his own concept of what a real workers' movement should be.

Originally, because the various sections of the International worked under different circumstances and had attained different degrees of development, the theoretical ideals which reflected the real movement would also diverge. The International, therefore, was open to all socialist and working class tendencies. The general policies of the International would be, by necessity, based on conference decisions that reflected the free political development that flowed from local needs. These decisions would be determined by free discussion within and between sections of all economic, social and political ideas. Marx, however, replaced this policy with a common program of "*political action*" (i.e. electioneering) by mass political parties via the fixed Hague conference of 1872. Rather than having this position agreed by the normal exchange of ideas and theoretical discussion in the sections guided by the needs of the practical struggle, Marx imposed what he considered as the future of the workers movement onto the International — and denounced those who disagreed with him as sectarians. The notion that what Marx considered as necessary might be another sectarian position imposed on the workers' movement did not enter his head nor that of his followers — as can be seen, Hobsbawm (mis)interpreted anarchism and its history thanks to this Marxist model and vision.

However, once we look at the anarchist movement without the blinkers created by Marxism, we see that rather than being a movement of "*primitive rebels*" Spanish Anarchism was a movement of working class people using valid tactics to meet their own social, economic and political goals — tactics and goals which evolved to meet changing circumstances. Seeing the rise of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism as the political expression of the class struggle, guided by the needs of the practical struggle they faced naturally follows when we recognise the Marxist model for what it is — just one possible interpretation of the future of the workers' movement rather than **the** future of that movement. Moreover, as the history of Social Democracy indicates, the predictions of Bakunin and the anarchists within the First International were proved correct. Therefore, rather than being "*primitive rebels*" or sectarian politics forced upon the working class, anarchism reflected the politics required to build a **revolutionary** workers' movement rather than a reformist mass party.

## 2. How accurate is Felix Morrow's book on the Spanish Revolution?

It is fair to say that most Marxists in Britain base their criticisms of the Spanish Anarchism, particularly the revolution of 1936, on the work of Trotskyist Felix Morrow. Morrow's book **Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, first published in 1938, actually is not that bad — for some kinds of information. However, it is basically written as Trotskyist propaganda. All too often Morrow is inaccurate, and over-eager to bend reality to fit the party line. This is particularly the case when discussing the actions and ideas of the CNT and FAI and when discussing the activities of his fellow Trotskyists in Spain, the Bolshevik-Leninists. We discuss the first set of inaccuracies in the following sections, here we mention the second, Morrow's comments on the Spanish Trotskyists.

The Bolshevik-Leninists, for example, an obscure sect who perhaps numbered 20 members at most, are, according to Morrow, transformed into the only ones who could save the Span-

ish Revolution — because they alone were members of the Fourth International, Morrow’s own organisation. As he put it:

*“Only the small forces of the Bolshevik-Leninists... clearly pointed the road for the workers.”* [Felix Morrow, **Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain**, p. 191]

*“Could that party [the party needed to lead the revolution] be any but a party standing on the platform of the Fourth International?”* [Op. Cit., p. 248]

And so on. As we will make clear in the following discussion, Morrow was as wrong about this as he was about anarchism.

The POUM — a more significant Marxist party in Spain, though still tiny compared to the anarchists — is also written up as far more important than it was, and slagged off for failing to lead the masses to victory (or listening to the Bolshevik-Leninists). The Fourth Internationalists “*offered the POUM the rarest and most precious form of aid: a consistent Marxist analysis*” [Op. Cit., p. 105] (never mind Spanish workers needing guns and solidarity!). But when such a programme — prepared in advance — was offered to the POUM by the Fourth International representative — only two hours after arriving in Spain, and a quarter of an hour after meeting the POUM [Op. Cit., p. 139] — the POUM were not interested. The POUM have been both attacked (and claimed as their own) by Trotskyists ever since.

It is Morrow’s attacks on anarchism, though, that have most readily entered leftist folklore — even among Marxists who reject Leninism. Some of Morrow’s criticisms are fair enough — but these were voiced by anarchists long before Morrow put pen to paper. Morrow, in fact, quotes and accepts the analyses of anarchists like Camillo Berneri (“*Berneri had been right*” etc. [Op. Cit., p. 153]), and praises anarchists like Durruti (“*the greatest military figure produced by the war*” [Op. Cit., p. 224]) — then sticks the boot into anarchism. Indeed, Durruti’s analysis is praised but he is transformed into “*no theoretician, but an activist leader of masses... his words express the revolutionary outlook of the class-conscious workers.*” [Op. Cit., p. 250] Of course, his words, activity and “*outlook*” (i.e. political analysis) did not spring out of thin air but rather, to state the obvious, were informed by and reflected his anarchist politics, history, activity and vision (which in turn reflected his experiences and needs as a member of the working class). Morrow obviously wanted to have his cake and eat it.

Typically for today’s left, perhaps, the most quoted sections of Morrow’s book are the most inaccurate. In the next eight sections we discuss some of the most inaccurate claims. After that we point out that Morrow’s analysis of the militias is deeply ironic given Trotsky’s actions as leader of the Red Army. Then we discuss some of Morrow’s inaccurate assertions about anarchism in general.

Of course, some of the errors we highlight in Morrow’s work are the product of the conditions in which it was written — thousands of miles from Spain in America, dependent on papers produced by Spanish Marxists, Anarchists and others. We cannot blame him for such mistakes (although we can blame the Trotskyist publisher who reprints his account without indicating his factual errors and the Marxist writers who repeat his claims without checking their accuracy). We **do**, however, blame Morrow for his errors and misrepresentations of the activities and politics of the Spanish Anarchists and anarchism in general. These errors derive from his politics and inability to understand anarchism or provide an honest account of it.

By the end of our discussion we hope to show why anarchists argue that Morrow's book is deeply flawed and its objectively skewed by the authors politics and so cannot be taken at face value. Morrow's book may bring comfort to those Marxists who look for ready-made answers and are prepared to accept the works of hacks at face-value. Those who want to learn from the past — instead of re-writing it — will have to look elsewhere.

### 3. Did a “*highly centralised*” FAI control the CNT?

According to Morrow, “*Spanish Anarchism had in the FAI a highly centralised party apparatus through which it maintained control of the CNT*” [Op. Cit., p. 100]

In reality, the FAI — the Iberian Anarchist Federation — was founded, in 1927, as a confederation of regional federations (including the Portuguese Anarchist Union). These regional federations, in turn, co-ordinated local and district federations of highly autonomous anarchist affinity groups. In the words of Murray Bookchin:

*“Like the CNT, the FAI was structured along confederal lines: the affinity groups were linked together in a Local Federation and the Local Federation in District and Regional Federations. A Local Federation was administered by an ongoing secretariat, usually of three persons, and a committee composed of one mandated delegate from each affinity group. This body comprised a sort of local executive committee. To allow for a full expression of rank-and-file views, the Local Federation was obliged to convene assemblies of all the **faistas** in its area. The District and Regional Federations, in turn, were simply the Local federation writ large, replicating the structure of the lower body. All the Local Districts and Regional Federations were linked together by a Peninsular Committee whose tasks, at least theoretically, were administrative... [A FAI secretary] admits that the FAI ‘exhibited a tendency towards centralism’ ... Yet it must also be emphasised that the affinity groups were far more independent than any comparable bodies in the Socialist Party, much less the Communist... the FAI was not an internally repressive organisation ... Almost as a matter of second nature, dissidents were permitted a considerable amount of freedom in voicing and publishing material against the leadership and established policies.”* [The Spanish Anarchists, pp. 197–8]

And:

*“Most writers on the Spanish labour movement seem to concur in the view that, with the departure of the moderates, the CNT was to fall under the complete domination of the FAI ... But is this appraisal correct? The FAI ... was more loosely jointed as an organisation than many of its admirers and critics seem to recognise. It has no bureaucratic apparatus, no membership cards or dues, and no headquarters with paid officials, secretaries, and clerks... They jealously guarded the autonomy of their affinity groups from the authority of higher organisational bodies — a state of mind hardly conducive to the development of a tightly knit, vanguard organisation.*

*“The FAI, moreover, was not a politically homogeneous organisation which followed a fixed ‘line’ like the Communists and many Socialists. It had no official program by which all **faistas** could mechanically guide their actions.”* [Op. Cit., p. 224]



So, while the FAI may have had centralising tendencies, a “*highly centralised*” political party it was not. Further, many anarcho-syndicalists and affinity groups were not in the FAI (though most seem to have supported it), and many FAI members put loyalty to the CNT (the anarcho-syndicalist union confederation) first. For instance, according to the minutes of the FAI national plenum of January-February 1936:

*“The Regional Committee [of Aragon, Rioja, and Navarra] is completely neglected by the majority of the militants because they are absorbed in the larger activities of the CNT”*

And:

*“One of the reasons for the poor condition of the FAI was the fact that almost all the comrades were active in the defence groups of the CNT”* (report from the Regional Federation of the North).

These are internal documents and so unlikely to be lies. [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: the History of the FAI**, p. 165 and p. 168]

Anarchists were obviously the main influence in the CNT. Indeed, the CNT was anarcho-syndicalist long before the FAI was founded — from its creation in 1910 the CNT had been anarcho-syndicalist and remained so for 17 years before the FAI existed. However, Morrow was not the only person to assert “*FAI control*” of the CNT. In fact, the claim of “*FAI control*” was an invention of a reformist minority within the organisation — people like Angel Pestana, ex-CNT National Secretary, who wanted to turn the CNT into a politically “*neutral*” union movement. Pestana later showed what he meant by forming the Syndicalist Party and standing for Parliament (the Cortes). Obviously, in the struggle against the reformists, anarcho-syndicalists — inside the FAI or not — voted for people they trusted to run CNT committees. The reformists (called **Treinistas**) lost, split from the CNT (taking about 10% of the membership with them), and the myth of “*FAI dictatorship*” was born. Rather than accept that the membership no longer supported them, the **Treinistas** consoled themselves with tales that a minority, the FAI, had taken control of the CNT.

In fact, due to its decentralised and federal structure, the FAI could not have had the sort of dominance over the CNT that is often attributed to it. At union congresses, where policies and the program for the movement were argued out:

*“[D]elegates, whether or not they were members of the FAI, were presenting resolutions adopted by their unions at open membership meetings. Actions taken at the congress had to be reported back to their unions at open meetings, and given the degree of union education among the members, it was impossible for delegates to support personal, non-representative positions.”* [Juan Gomez Casas, **Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI**, p. 121]

The union committees were typically rotated out of office frequently and committeemen continued to work as wage-earners. In a movement so closely based on the shop floor, the FAI could not maintain influence for long if they ignored the concerns and opinions of co-workers. Moreover, only a minority of the anarcho-syndicalist activists in the CNT belonged to the FAI and,

as Juan Gomez Casas points out in his history of the FAI, FAI militants frequently had a prior loyalty to the CNT. Thus his summation seems correct:

*“As a minority organisation, the FAI could not possibly have had the kind of control attributed to it ... in 1931 ... there were fifty CNT members for each member of a FAI group. The FAI was strongly federalist, with its groups at the base freely associated. It could not dominate an organisation like the CNT, which had fifty times as many members and was also opposed to hierarchy and centralism. We know that FAI militants were also CNT militants, and frequently they were loyal first to the CNT. Their influence was limited to the base of the organisation through participation in the plenums of militants or unions meetings.” [Op. Cit., p. 133]*

He sums up by arguing:

*“The myth of the FAI as conqueror and ruler of the CNT was created basically by the Treinistas” [Op. Cit., p. 134]*

Therefore, Morrow is re-cycling an argument which was produced by the reformist wing of the CNT after it had lost influence in the union rank-and-file. Perhaps he judges the FAI by his own standards? After all, the aim of Leninists is for the vanguard party to control the labour unions in their countries. Anarchists reject such a vision and believe in union autonomy — influence of political parties and groups should only exist in as much as they influence the rank-and-file who control the union. Rather than aim to control the CNT, the FAI worked to influence its membership. In the words of Francisco Ascaso (friend of Durruti and an influential anarchist militant in the CNT and FAI in his own right):

*“There is not a single militant who as a ‘FAIista’ intervenes in union meetings. I work, therefore I am an exploited person. I pay my dues to the workers’ union and when I intervene at union meetings I do it as someone who is exploited, and with the right which is granted me by the card in my possession, as do the other militants, whether they belong to the FAI or not.” [cited by Abel Paz, Durruti: The People Armed, p. 137]*

In other words, the FAI “controlled” the CNT only to the extent it influenced the membership — who, in fact, controlled the organisation. We must also note that Ascaso’s comment echoes Bakunin’s that the “purpose of the Alliance [i.e. anarchist federation] is to promote the Revolution ... it will combat all ambition to dominate the revolutionary movement of the people, either by cliques or individuals. The Alliance will promote the Revolution only through the NATURAL BUT NEVER OFFICIAL INFLUENCE of all members of the Alliance.” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 387]

Regardless of Morrow’s claims, the FAI was a federation of autonomous affinity groups in which, as one member put it, “[e]ach FAI group thought and acted as it deemed fit, without bothering about what the others might be thinking or deciding ... they had no ... opportunity or jurisdiction ... to foist a party line upon the grass-roots.” [Francisco Carrasquer, quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 28] There was co-ordination in a federal structure, of course, but that did not create a “highly centralised” party-like organisation. Morrow judged the FAI according to his own standards, squeezing it into his ideological vision of the world rather than reporting the reality

of the situation (see Stuart Christie's work for a more detailed refutation of the usual Marxist and Liberal inventions of the activities and nature of the FAI).

In addition, Morrow's picture of the FAI implicitly paints the CNT as a mere "*transmission belt*" for that organisation (and so a re-production of the Bolshevik position on the relationship of the labour unions and the revolutionary party). Such a picture, however, ignores the CNT's character as a non-hierarchical, democratic (self-managed) mass movement which had many tendencies within it. It also fails to understand the way anarchists seek to influence mass organisations — not by assuming positions of power but by convincing their fellow workers' of the validity of their ideas in policy making mass assemblies (see section J.3.6 for more details).

In other words, Morrow's claims are simply false and express a total lack of understanding of the nature of the CNT, the FAI and their relationship.

#### 4. What is the history of the CNT and the Communist International?

Morrow states that the "*tide of the October Revolution had, for a short time, overtaken the CNT. It had sent a delegate to the Comintern [Communist International] Congress in 1921. The anarchists had then resorted to organised fraction work and recaptured it.*" [Op. Cit., p. 100] He links this to the FAI by stating "[t]henceforward ... the FAI ... maintained control of the CNT." Given that the FAI was formed in 1927 and the CNT disassociated itself with the Comintern in 1922, five years before the FAI was created, "*thenceforward*" does not do the FAI's ability to control the CNT before it was created justice!

Partly it is the inability of the Communist Party and its Trotskyist off-shoots to dominate the CNT which explains Morrow's comments. Seeing anarchism as "*petty bourgeois*" it is hard to combine this with the obvious truth that a mass, revolutionary, workers' union could be so heavily influenced by anarchism rather than Marxism. Hence the need for FAI (or anarchist) "*control*" of the CNT. It allows Trotskyists ignore dangerous ideological questions. As J. Romero Maura notes, the question why anarchism influenced the CNT "*in fact raises the problem why the reformist social democratic, or alternatively the communist conceptions, did not impose themselves on the CNT as they managed to in most of the rest of Europe. This question ... is based on the false assumption that the anarcho-syndicalist conception of the workers' struggle in pre-revolutionary society was completely at odds with what the **real** social process signified (hence the constant reference to religious', 'messianic', models as explanations).*" He argues that the "*explanation of Spanish anarcho-syndicalist success in organising a mass movement with a sustained revolutionary **elan** should initially be sought in the very nature of the anarchist concept of society and of how to achieve revolution.*" [J. Romero Maura, "*The Spanish Case*", in **Anarchism Today**, D. Apter and J. Joll (eds.), p. 78 and p. 65] Once we do that, we can see the weakness of Morrow's (and others) "*Myth of the FAI*" — having dismissed the obvious reason for anarchist influence, namely its practicality and valid politics, there can only be "*control by the FAI.*"

However, the question of affiliation of the CNT to the Comintern is worth discussing as it indicates the differences between anarchists and Leninists. As will be seen, the truth of this matter is somewhat different to Morrow's claims and indicates well his distorted vision.

Firstly to correct a factual error. The CNT in fact sent two delegations to the Comintern. At its 1919 national congress, the CNT discussed the Russian Revolution and accepted a proposition that stated it "*declares itself a staunch defender of the principles upheld by Bakunin in the First*

*International. It declares further that it affiliates provisionally to the Third International on account of its predominantly revolutionary character, pending the holding of the International Congress in Spain, which must establish the foundations which are to govern the true workers' International.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, pp. 220–1]

In June 1920, Angel Pestana arrived in Moscow and represented the CNT at the Second Congress of the Communist International. He was arrested when he arrived back in Spain and so could not give his eye-witness account of the strangulation of the revolution and the deeply dishonest manipulation of the congress by the Communist Party. A later delegation arrived in April 1921, headed by Andres Nin and Joaquin Maurin professing to represent the CNT. Actually, Nin and Maurin represented virtually no one but the Lerida local federation (their stronghold). Their actions and claims were disavowed by a plenum of the CNT the following August.

How did Nin and Maurin manage to get into a position to be sent to Russia? Simply because of the repression the CNT was under at the time. This was the period when Catalan bosses hired gun men to assassinate CNT militants and members and the police exercised the notorious practice known as *ley de fugas* (shot while trying to escape). In such a situation, the normal workings of the CNT came under must stress and "*with the best known libertarian militants imprisoned, deported, exiled, if not murdered outright, Nin and his group managed to hoist themselves on to the National Committee ... Pestana's report not being available, it was decided that a further delegation should be sent ... in response to Moscow's invitation to the CNT to take part in the foundation of the Red International of Labour Unions.*" [Ignacio de Llorens, *The CNT and the Russian Revolution*, p. 8] Juan Gomez Casas confirms this account:

*"At a plenum held in Lerida in 1921, while the CNT was in disarray [due to repression] in Catalonia, a group of Bolsheviks was designated to represent the Spanish CNT in Russia ... The restoration of constitutional guarantees by the Spanish government in April 1922, permitted the anarcho-sindicalists to meet in Saragossa in June 11 ... [where they] confirmed the withdrawal of the CNT from the Third International and the entrance on principle into the new [revolutionary syndicalist] International Working Men's Association."* [Anarchist Organisation: History of the FAI, p. 61]

We should note that along with pro-Bolshevik Nin and Maurin was anarchist Gaston Leval. Leval quickly got in touch with Russian and other anarchists, helping some imprisoned Russian anarchists get deported after bringing news of their hunger strike to the assembled international delegates. By embarrassing Lenin and Trotsky, Leval helped save his comrades from the prison camp and so saved their lives.

By the time Leval arrived back in Spain, Pestana's account of his experiences had been published — along with accounts of the Bolshevik repression of workers, the Kronstadt revolt, the anarchist movement and other socialist parties. These accounts made it clear that the Russian Revolution had become dominated by the Communist Party and the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" little more than dictatorship by the central committee of that party.

Moreover, the way the two internationals operated violated basic libertarian principles. Firstly, the "*Red Labour International completely subordinated trade unions to the Communist Party.*" [Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, p. 38] This completely violated the CNT principle of unions being controlled by their members (via self-management from the bottom up). Secondly, the congresses' methodology in its debates and decision-making were alien to the CNT

tradition. In that organisation self-management was its pride and glory and its gatherings and congresses reflected this. Pestana could not fathom the fierce struggle surrounding the make-up of the chairmanship of the Comintern congress:

*“Pestana says that he was particularly intrigued by the struggle for the chairmanship. He soon realised that the chair **was** the congress, and that the Congress was a farce. The chairman made the rules, presided over deliberations, modified proposals at will, changed the agenda, and presented proposals of his own. For a start, the way the chair handled the gavel was very inequitable. For example, Zinoviev gave a speech which lasted one and one-half hours, although each speaker was supposedly limited to ten minutes. Pestana tried to rebut the speech, but was cut off by the chairman, watch in hand. Pestana himself was rebutted by Trotsky who spoke for three-quarters of an hour, and when Pestana wanted to answer Trotsky’s attack on him, the chairman declared the debate over.” [Op. Cit., pp. 37–8]*

In addition, “[i]n theory, every delegate was free to table a motion, but the chair itself selected the ones that were ‘interesting.’ Proportional voting [by delegation or delegate] had been provided for, but was not implemented. The Russian Communist Party ensured that it enjoyed a comfortable majority.” Peirats continues by noting that “[t]o top it all, certain important decisions were not even made in the congress hall, but were made *begin the scenes*.” That was how the resolution that “[i]n forthcoming world congresses of the Third International, the national trade union organisations affiliated to it are to be represented by delegates from each country’s Communist Party” was adopted. He also noted that “[o]bjections to this decision were quite simply ignored.” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 224]

Many of the syndicalist delegates to this “*pantomime*” congress later meet in Berlin and founded the anarcho-syndicalist **International Workers Association** based on union autonomy, self-management and federalism. Unsurprisingly, once Pestana and Leval reported back to their organisation, the CNT rejected the Bolshevik Myth and re-affirmed the libertarian principles it had proclaimed at its 1919 congress. At a plenum of the CNT in 1922, the organisation withdrew its provisional affiliation and voted to join the syndicalist International formed in Berlin.

Therefore, rather than the anarchists conducting “*fraction work*” to “*recapture*” the CNT, the facts are the pro-Bolshevik National Committee of 1921 came about due to the extreme repression the CNT was suffering at the time. Militants were being assassinated in the streets, including committee members. In this context it is easy to see how an unrepresentative minority could temporarily gain influence in the National Committee. Moreover, it was CNT plenary session which revoked the organisations provisional affiliation to the Comintern — that is, a regular meeting of mandated and accountable delegates. In other words, by the membership itself who had been informed of what had actually been happening under the Bolsheviks. In addition, it was this plenum which agreed affiliation to the anarcho-syndicalist **International Workers Association** founded in Berlin during 1922 by syndicalists and anarchists horrified by the Bolshevik dictatorship, having seen it at first hand.

Thus the decision of the CNT in 1922 (and the process by which this decision was made) follow exactly the decisions and processes of 1919. That congress agreed to provisionally affiliate to the Comintern until such time as a real workers’ International inspired by the ideas of Bakunin was created. The only difference was that this International was formed in Germany, not Spain. Given this, it is impossible to argue that the anarchists “*recaptured*” the CNT.

As can be seen, Morrow's comment presents radically false image of what happened during this period. Rather than resort to "*fraction work*" to "*recapture*" the CNT, the policies of the CNT in 1919 and 1922 were identical. Moreover, the decision to disaffiliate from the Comintern was made by a confederal meeting of mandated delegates representing the rank-and-file as was the original. The anarchists did not "*capture*" the CNT, rather they continued to influence the membership of the organisation as they had always done. Lastly, the concept of "*capture*" displays no real understanding of how the CNT worked — each syndicate was autonomous and self-managed. There was no real officialdom to take over, just administrative posts which were unpaid and conducted after working hours. To "*capture*" the CNT was impossible as each syndicate would ignore any unrepresentative minority which tried to do so.

However, Morrow's comments allow us to indicate some of the key differences between anarchists and Leninists — the CNT rejected the Comintern because it violated its principles of self-management, union autonomy and equality and built party domination of the union movement in its place.

## 5. Why did the CNT not join the Workers' Alliance?

Morrow in his discussion of the struggles of the 1930s implies that the CNT was at fault in not joining the Socialist UGT's "*Workers' Alliance*" (*Alianza Obrera*). These were first put forward by the Marxist-Leninists of the BOC (Workers and Peasants Bloc — later to form the POUM) after their attempts to turn the CNT into a Bolshevik vanguard failed [Paul Preston, *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 154]. Socialist Party and UGT interest began only after their election defeat in 1933. By 1934, however, there existed quite a few alliances, including one in Asturias in which the CNT participated. Nationally, however, the CNT refused to join with the UGT and this, he implies, lead to the defeat of the October 1934 uprising (see next section for a discussion of this rebellion).

However, Morrow fails to provide any relevant historical background to understand the CNT's decision. Moreover, their reasons *why* they did not join have a striking similarity to Morrow's own arguments against the "*Workers' Alliance*" (which may explain why Morrow does not mention them). In effect, the CNT is damned for having policies similar to Morrow's but having principles enough to stick to them.

First, we must discuss the history of UGT and CNT relationships in order to understand the context within which the anarchists made their decision. Unless we do this, Morrow's claims may seem more reasonable than they actually are. Once we have done this we will discuss the politics of that decision.

From 1931 (the birth of the Second Spanish Republic) to 1933 the Socialists, in coalition with Republicans, had attacked the CNT (a repeat, in many ways, of the UGT's collaboration with the quasi-fascist Primo de Rivera dictatorship of 1923–30). Laws were passed, with Socialist help, making lightening strikes illegal and state arbitration compulsory. Anarchist-organised strikes were violently repressed, and the UGT provided scabs — as against the CNT Telephone Company strike of 1931. This strike gives in indication of the role of the socialists during its time as part of the government (Socialist Largo Caballero was the Minister of Labour, for example):

*"The UGT ... had its own bone to pick with the CNT. The telephone syndicate, which the CNT had established in 1918, was a constant challenge to the Socialists' grip on*

the Madrid labour movement. Like the construction workers' syndicate, it was a CNT enclave in a solidly UGT centre. Accordingly, the government and the Socialist Party found no difficulty in forming a common front to break the strike and weaken CNT influence.

*"The Ministry of Labour declared the strike illegal and the Ministry of the Interior called out the Civil Guard to intimidate the strikers ... Shedding all pretence of labour solidarity, the UGT provided the **Compania Telefonica** with scabs while **El Socialista**, the Socialist Party organ, accused the CNT of being run by **pistoleros**. Those tactics were successful in Madrid, where the defeated strikers were obliged to enrol in the UGT to retain their jobs. So far as the Socialists were concerned, the CNT's appeals for solidarity had fallen on deaf ears...*

*"In Seville, however, the strike began to take on very serious dimensions... on July 20, a general strike broke out in Seville and serious fighting erupted in the streets. This strike ... stemmed from the walkout of the telephone workers ... pitched battles took place in the countryside around the city between the Civil Guard and the agricultural workers. Maura, as minister of interior, decided to crush the 'insurrection' ruthlessly. Martial law was declared and the CNT's headquarters was reduced to shambles by artillery fire. After nine days, during which heavily armed police detachments patrolled the streets, the Seville general strike came to an end. The struggle in the Andalusian capital left 40 dead and some 200 wounded."* [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, pp. 221–2]

Elsewhere, "[d]uring a Barcelona building strike CNT workers barricaded themselves in and said they would only surrender to regular troops. The army arrived and then machine-gunned them as soon as they surrendered." [Antony Beevor, **The Spanish Civil War**, p. 33] In other words, the republican-socialist government repressed the CNT with violence as well as using the law to undermine CNT activities and strikes.

Morrow fails to discuss this history of violence against the CNT. He mentions in passing that the republican-socialist coalition government "[i]n crushing the CNT, the troops broadened the repression to the whole working class." He states that "[u]nder the cover of putting down an anarchist putsch in January 1933, the Civil Guard 'mopped up' various groups of trouble makers. And encounter with peasants at Casas Viejas, early in January 1933, became a **cause celebre** which shook the government to its foundations." However, his account of the Casas Viejas massacre is totally inaccurate. He states that "the little village ..., after two years of patient waiting for the Institute of Agrarian Reform to divide the neighbouring Duke's estate, the peasants had moved in and begun to till the soil for themselves." [Op. Cit., p. 22]

Nothing could be further from the truth. Firstly, we must note that the land workers (who were not, in the main, peasants) were members of the CNT. Secondly, as we pointed in section 1, the uprising had nothing to do with land reform. The CNT members did not "till the soil", rather they rose in insurrection as part of a planned CNT-FAI uprising based on an expected rail workers strike (the "anarchist putsch" Morrow mentions). The workers were too busy fighting the Civil and Assault Guards to till anything. He is correct in terms of the repression, of course, but his account of the events leading up to it is not only wrong, it is misleading (indeed, it appears to be an invention based on Trotskyist ideology rather than having any basis in reality). Rather than being part of a "broadened ... repression [against] the whole working class," it was actually part

of the “*putting down*” of the anarchist revolt. CNT members were killed — along with a dozen politically neutral workers who were selected at random and murdered. Thus Morrow downplays the role of the Socialists in repressing the CNT and FAI — he presents it as general repression rather than a massacre resulting from repressing a CNT revolt.

He even quotes a communist paper stating that 9 000 political prisoners were in jail in June 1933. Morrow states that they were “*mostly workers*.” [p. 23] Yes, they were mostly workers, CNT members in fact — “[i]n mid-April [1933]... the CNT launched a massive campaign to release imprisoned CNT-FAI militants whose numbers had now soared to about 9 000.” [Bookchin, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 231–2]

Moreover, during and after CNT insurrections in Catalonia in 1932, and the much wider insurrections of January 1933 (9 000 CNT members jailed) and December 1933 (16 000 jailed) Socialist solidarity was nil. Indeed, the 1932 and January 1933 revolts had been repressed by the government which the Socialist Party was a member of.

In other words, and to state the obvious, the socialists had been part of a government which repressed CNT revolts and syndicates, imprisoned and killed their members, passed laws to restrict their ability to strike and use direct action and provided scabs during strikes. Little wonder that Peirats states “[i]t was difficult for the CNT and the FAI to get used to the idea of an alliance with their Socialist oppressors.” [Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution, p. 94]

It is **only** in this context can we understand the events of 1934 and the refusal of the CNT to run into the UGT’s alliance. Morrow, needless to say, does not present this essential context and so the reader cannot understand why the CNT acted as it did in response to Socialist appeals for “unity.” Instead, Morrow implies that CNT-FAI opposition to “workers alliances” were due to them believing “*all governments were equally bad*.” [p. 29] Perhaps if Morrow had presented an honest account of the repression the republican-socialist government had inflicted on the CNT then the reader could make an informed judgement on why anarchist opposition to the socialist proposals existed. Rather than being sectarian or against labour unity, they had been at receiving end of extensive socialist scabbing and state repression.

Moreover, as well as the recent history of socialist repression and scabbing, there was also the experience of a similar alliance between the CNT and UGT that had occurred in 1917. The first test of the alliance came with a miners strike in Andalusia, and a “*CNT proposal for a joint general strike, to be initiated by UGT miners and railway workers, had been rejected by the Madrid Socialists ... the miners, after striking for four months, returned to work in defeat*.” Little wonder that “*the pact was in shreds. It was to be eliminated completely when a general strike broke out in Barcelona over the arrests of the CNT leaders and the assassination of Layret. Once again the CNT called upon the UGT for support. Not only was aid refused but it was denied with an arrogance that clearly indicated the Socialists had lost all interest in future collaboration... The strike in Catalonia collapsed and, with it, any prospect of collaboration between the two unions for years to come*.” [Bookchin, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 175–6]

Of course, such historical context would confuse readers with facts and so goes unmentioned by Morrow.

In addition, there was another reason for opposing the “*workers’ alliances*” — particularly an alliance between the UGT and CNT. Given the history of UGT and CNT pacts plus the actions of the UGT and socialists in the previous government it was completely sensible and politically principled. This reason was political and flowed from the CNT’s libertarian vision. As Durruti argued in 1934:



*“The alliance, to be revolutionary, must be genuinely working class. It must be the result of an agreement between the workers’ organisation, and those alone. No party, however, socialist it may be, can belong to a workers’ alliance, which should be built from its foundations, in the enterprises where the workers struggle. Its representative bodies must be the workers’ committee chosen in the shops, the factories, the mines and the villages. We must reject any agreement on a national level, between National Committees, but rather favour an alliance carried out at the base by the workers themselves. Then and only then, can the revolutionary drive come to life, develop and take root.”* [quoted by Abel Paz, **Durruti: The People Armed**, p. 154]

In the Central Region, Orobon Fernandez argued along similar lines in Madrid’s **La Tierra**:

*“Revolutionary proletarian democracy is direct management of society by the workers, a certain bulwark against party dictatorships and a guarantee of the development of the revolution’s forces and undertakings... what matters must is that general guidelines are laid down so that these may serve as a platform of the alliance and furnish a combative and constructive norm for the united forces ... [These include:] acceptance of revolutionary proletarian democracy, which is to say, the will of the majority of the proletariat, as the common denominator and determining factor of the new order of things... immediate socialisation of the means of production, transportation, exchange, accommodation and finance ... federated according to their area of interest and confederated at national level, the municipal and industrial organisations will maintain the principle of unity in the economic structure.”* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, pp. 74–5]

The May 1936 Saragossa congress of the CNT passed a resolution concerning revolutionary alliances which was obviously based on these arguments. It stated that in order *“to make the social revolution an effective reality, the social and political system regulating the life of the country has to be utterly destroyed”* and that the *“new revolutionary order will be determined by the free choice of the working class.”* [quoted by Jose Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

Only such an alliance, from the bottom up and based on workers’ self-management could be a revolutionary one. Indeed, any pact not based on this but rather conducted between organisations would be a pact the CNT and the bureaucracy of the UGT — and remove any possibility of creating genuine bodies of working class self-management (as the history of the Civil War proved). Indeed, Morrow seems to agree:

*“The broad character of the proletarian insurrection was explained by the Communist Left (Trotskyist). It devoted itself to efforts to build the indispensable instrument of the insurrection: workers’ councils constituted by delegates representing all the labour parties and unions, the shops and streets; to be created in every locality and joined together nationally ... Unfortunately, the socialists failed to understand the profound need of these Workers’ Alliances. The bureaucratic traditions were not to be so easily overcome ... the socialist leaders thought that the Workers’ Alliances meant they would have merely to share leadership with the Communist Left and other dissident communist groups ... actually in most cases they [Workers’ Alliances] were merely ‘top’ committees, without*

*elected or lower-rank delegates, that is, little more than liaison committees between the leadership of the organisations involved.” [Op. Cit., pp. 27–8]*

As can be seen, this closely follows Durruti’s arguments. Bar the reference of “*labour parties*,” Morrow’s “*indispensable instrument*” is identical to Durruti’s and other anarchist’s arguments against taking part in the “*Workers’ Alliances*” created by the UGT and the creation of genuine alliances from the bottom-up. Thus Morrow faults the CNT for trying to force the UGT to form a **real** workers’ alliance by not taking part in what Morrow himself admits were “*little more than liaison committees between the leadership*”! Also, Morrow argues that “[w]ithout developing soviets — workers’ councils — it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie” and he asks “[h]ow could party agreements be the substitute for the necessary vast network of workers’ councils?” [Op. Cit., p. 89 and p. 114] Which was, of course, the CNT-FAI’s argument. It seems strange that Morrow faults the CNT for trying to create real workers’ councils, the “*indispensable instrument*” of the revolution, by not taking part in a “*party agreements*” urged by the UGT which would undermine real attempts at rank-and-file unity from below.

Of course, Morrow’s statement that “*labour parties and unions*” should be represented by delegates as well as “*the shop and street*” contradicts claims it would be democratic. After all, that it would mean that some workers would have multiple votes (one from their shop, their union and their party). Moreover, it would mean that parties would have an influence greater than their actual support in the working class — something a minuscule group like the Spanish Trotskyists would obviously favour as would the bureaucrats of the Socialist and Communist Parties. Little wonder the anarchists urged a workers’ alliance made up of actual workers rather than an organisation which would allow bureaucrats, politicians and sects more influence than they actually had or deserved.

In addition, the “*Workers’ Alliances*” were not seen by the UGT and Socialist Party as an organisation of equals. Rather, in words of historian Paul Preston, “*from the first it seemed that the Socialists saw the Alianza Obrera was a possible means of dominating the workers movement in areas where the PSOE and UGT were relatively weak.*” [Op. Cit., p. 154] The Socialist Party only allowed regional branches of the Alianza Obrera to be formed only if they could guarantee Party control would never be lost. [Adrian Schubert “*The Epic Failure: The Asturian Revolution of October 1934*”, in **Revolution and War in Spain**, Paul Preston (ed.), p. 127] Raymond Carr argues that the Socialists, “*in spite of professions to the contrary, wished to keep socialist domination of the Alianza Obrera*” [Spain: 1808–1975, pp. 634–5f] And only one month after the first alliance was set up, one of its founder members — the Catalan **Socialist Union** — left in protest over PSOE domination. [Preston, **The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 157] In Madrid, the Alianza was “*dominated by the Socialists, who imposed their own policy.*” [Op. Cit., p. 154] Indeed, as Jose Peirats notes, in Asturias where the CNT had joined the Alliance, “*despite the provisions of the terms of the alliance to which the CNT had subscribed, the order for the uprising was issued by the socialists. In Oviedo a specifically socialist, revolutionary committee was secretly at work in Oviedo, which contained no CNT representatives.*” [The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, vol. 1, p. 78] Largo Caballero’s desire for trade union unity in 1936 was from a similar mould — “[t]he clear implication was that proletarian unification meant Socialist take-over.” Little wonder Preston states that “[i]f the use that he [Caballero] made of the Alianza Obreras in 1934 had revealed anything, it was that the

*domination of the working class movement by the UGT meant far more to Largo Caballero than any future prospect of revolution.*" [Preston, *Op. Cit.*, p. 270]

As can be seen, the CNT's position seemed a sensible one given the nature and activities of the "Workers' Alliance" in practice. Also it seems strange that, if unity was the UGT's aims, that a CNT call, made by the national plenary in February 1934, for information and for the UGT to clearly and publicly state its revolutionary objectives, met with no reply. [Peirats, *Op. Cit.*, p. 75] In addition, the Catalan Workers' Alliance called a general strike in March 1934 the day *after* the CNT's — hardly an example of workers' unity. [Norman Jones, *"Regionalism and Revolution in Catalonia"*, *Revolution and War in Spain*, Paul Preston (ed.), p. 102]

Thus, the reasons why the CNT did not join in the UGT's "Workers' Alliance" are clear. As well as the natural distrust towards organisations that had repressed them and provided scabs to break their strikes just one year previously, there were political reasons for opposing such an alliance. Rather than being a force to ensure revolutionary organisations springing from the workplace, the "Workers' Alliance" was little more than pacts between the bureaucrats of the UGT and various Marxist Parties. This was Morrow's own argument, which also provided the explanation why such an alliance would weaken any real revolutionary movement. To requote Morrow, "[w]ithout developing soviets — workers' councils — it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie." [Op. Cit., p. 89]

That is exactly what happened in July, 1936, when the CNT did forsake its anarchist politics and joined in a "Workers' Alliance" type organisation with other anti-fascist parties and unions to set up the "Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias" (see section 20). Thus Morrow himself provides the explanation of the CNT's **political** rationale for being wary of the UGT's "Workers' Alliance" while, of course, refusing to provide the historical context the decision was made.

However, while the CNT's refusal to join the "Workers' Alliance" outside of Asturias may have been principled (and sensible), it may be argued that they were the only organisation with revolutionary potential (indeed, this would be the only argument Trotskyists could put forward to explain their hypocrisy). Such an argument would be false for two reasons.

Firstly, such Alliances may have potentially created a revolutionary situation but they would have hindered the formation of working class organs of self-management such as workers' councils (soviets). This was the experience of the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias and of the Asturias revolt — in spite of massive revolutionary upheaval such councils based on delegates from workplace and community assemblies were **not** formed.

Secondly, the CNT policy of "Unity, yes, but by the rank-and-file" was a valid method of "from the bottom up solidarity." This can be seen from just two examples — Aragon in 1934 and Madrid in 1936. In Aragon, there was a "general strike that had totally paralysed the Aragonese capital throughout April 1935, ending ... on 10 May... the Zaragoza general strike had been a powerful advertisement of the value of a united working-class front ... [However,] no formal agreement ... had been reached in Zaragoza. The pact there has been created on a purely circumstantial basis with a unity of trade-union action achieved in quite specific circumstances and generated to a considerable extent by the workers themselves." [Graham Kelsey, *Anarchism in Aragon*, p. 72] In Madrid, April 1936 (in the words of Morrow himself) "the CNT declared a general strike in Madrid ... The UGT had not been asked to join the strike, and at first had denounced it ... But the workers came out of all the shops and factories and public services ... because they wanted to fight, and only the anarchists were calling them to struggle." [Op. Cit., p. 41]

Thus Morrow's comments against the CNT refusing to join the Workers' Alliance do not provide the reader with the historical context required to make an informed judgement of the CNT's decision. Moreover, they seem hypocritical as the CNT's reasons for refusing to join is similar to Morrow's own arguments against the Workers' Alliance. In addition, the CNT's practical counter-proposal of solidarity from below had more revolutionary potential as it was far more likely to promote rank-and-file unity plus the creation of self-managed organisations such as workers' councils. The Workers' Alliance system would have hindered such developments.

## 6. Was the October 1934 revolt sabotaged by the CNT?

Again, following Morrow, Marxists have often alleged that the Socialist and Workers Alliance strike wave, of October 1934, was sabotaged by the CNT. To understand this allegation, you have to understand the background to October 1934, and the split in the workers' movement between the CNT and the UGT (unions controlled by the reformist Socialist Party, the PSOE).

Socialist conversion to "*revolution*" occurred only after the elections of November 1933. In the face of massive and bloody repression (see last section), the CNT-FAI had agitated for a mass abstention at the polling booth. Faced with this campaign, the republicans and socialists lost and all the laws they had passed against the CNT were used against themselves. When cabinet seats were offered to the non-republican (fascist or quasi-fascist) right, in October 1934, the PSOE/UGT called for a general strike. If the CNT, nationally, failed to take part in this — a mistake recognised by many anarchist writers — this was not (as reading Morrow suggests) because the CNT thought "*all governments were equally bad*" [Morrow, *Op. Cit.*, p. 29], but because of well-founded, as it turned out, mistrust of Socialist aims.

A CNT call, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1934, for the UGT to clearly and publicly state its revolutionary objectives, had met with no reply. As Peirats argues, "*[t]hat the absence of the CNT did not bother them [the UGT and Socialist Party] is clear from their silence in regards to the [CNT's] National Plenary's request.*" [Peirats, *Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, p. 96] Rhetoric aside, the Socialist Party's main aim in October seems to have been to force new elections, so they could again form a (mildly reformist) coalition with the Republicans (their programme for the revolt was written by right-wing socialist Indalecio Prieto and seemed more like an election manifesto prepared by the Liberal Republicans than a program for revolutionary change). This was the viewpoint of the CNT, for example. Thus, the CNT, in effect, was to be used as cannon-fodder to help produce another government that would attack the CNT.

As we discussed in the last section, the UGT backed "Workers Alliances" were little better. To repeat our comments again, the Socialist Party (PSOE) saw the alliances as a means of dominating the workers movement in areas where the UGT was weak. The Socialist "Liaison Committee", for instance, set up to prepare for insurrection, only allowed regional branches to take part in the alliances if they could guarantee Party control (see last section). Raymond Carr argues that the Socialists, "*in spite of professions to the contrary, wished to keep socialist domination of the **Alianza Obrera**.*" [Spain: 1808–1975, pp. 634–5f] Only one month after the first alliance was set up, one of its founder members — the Socialist Union of Catalonia — left in protest over PSOE domination.

During October the only real centre of resistance was in Asturias (on the Spanish north coast). However, before discussing that area, we must mention Madrid and Barcelona. According to Morrow, Catalonia "*should have been the fortress of the uprising*" and that "*[t]erribly discredited*

for their refusal to join the October revolt, the anarchists sought to apologise by pointing to the repression they were undergoing at the time from Companys.” [Op. Cit., p. 30 and p. 32] Morrow fails, however and yet again, to mention a few important facts.

Firstly, the uprising in Catalonia was pushed for and led by Estat Catala which had “temporary ascendancy over the other groups in the Esquerra” (the Catalan Nationalist Party which was the Catalan government). “Companys felt obliged to yield to Dencas’ [the leader of Estat Catala] demand that Catalonia should take this opportunity for breaking with Madrid.” [Gerald Brenan, **The Spanish Labyrinth**, pp. 282–3] Estat Catala “was a Youth movement ... and composed mostly of workmen and adventurers — men drawn from the same soil as the **sindicatos libres** [boss created anti-CNT yellow unions] of a dozen years before — with a violent antagonism to the Anarcho-Syndicalists. It had a small military organisation, the **escamots**, who wore green uniforms. It represented Catalan Nationalism in its most intransigent form: it was in fact Catalan Fascism.” [Op. Cit., p. 282] Gabriel Jackson calls Estat Catala a “quasi-fascist movement within the younger ranks of the Esquerra.” [**The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931–1939**, p. 150] Ronald Fraser terms it “the extreme nationalist and proto-fascist” wing of the party. [**Blood of Spain**, p. 535] Hugh Thomas notes “the fascist colouring of Dencas ideas.” [**The Spanish Civil War**, p. 135]

In other words, Morrow attacks the CNT for not participating in a revolt organised and led by Catalan Fascists (or, at best, near fascists)!

Secondly, far from being apologetics, the repression the CNT was suffering from Dencas police forces was very real and was occurring right up to the moment of the revolt. In the words of historian Paul Preston:

*“[T]he Anarchists bitterly resented the way in which the Generalitat had followed a repressive policy against them in the previous months. This had been the work of the Generalitat’s counsellor for public order, Josep Dencas, leader of the quasi-fascist, ultra-nationalist party Estat Catala.”* [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 176]

This is confirmed by anarchist accounts of the rising. As Peirats points out:

*“On the eve of the rebellion the Catalan police jailed as many anarchists as they could put their hands on ... The union offices had been shut for some time. The press censor had completely blacked out the October 6<sup>th</sup> issue of **Solidaridad Obrera** ... When the woodworkers began to open their offices, they were attacked by the police, and a furious gunfight ensued. The official radio ... reported ... that the fight had already begun against the FAI fascists ... In the afternoon large numbers of police and **escamots** turned out to attack and shut down the editorial offices of **Solidaridad Obrera**.”* [Peirats, Op. Cit., pp. 98–9]

In other words, the first shots fired in the Catalan revolt were against the CNT by those in revolt against the central government!

Why were the first shots of the revolt directed at the members of the CNT? Simply because they were trying to take part in the revolt in an organised and coherent manner as urged by the CNT’s Regional Committee itself. In spite of the mass arrests of anarchists and CNT militants the night before by the Catalan rebels, the CNT’s Catalan Regional Committee issued a clandestine leaflet that stated that the CNT “must enter the battle in a manner consistent with its revolutionary

*anarchist principles ... The revolt which broke out this morning must acquire the characteristics of a popular act through the actions of the proletariat ... We demand the right to intervene in this struggle and we will take this.*" A leaflet had to be issued as **Solidaridad Obrera** was several hours late in appearing due to censorship by the Catalan state. The workers had tried to open their union halls (all CNT union buildings had been closed by the Catalan government since the CNT revolt of December 1933) because the CNT's leaflet had called for the "[i]mmediate opening of our union buildings and the concentration of the workers on those premises." [quoted by Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 85] The participation of the CNT in the revolt as an organised force was something the Catalan rebels refused to allow and so they fired on workers trying to open their union buildings. Indeed, after shutting down **Solidaridad Obrera**, the police then tried to break up the CNT's regional plenum that was then in session, but fortunately it was meeting on different premises and so they failed. [Peirats, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 85–6]

Juan Gomez Casas argues that:

*"The situation [in October 1934] was especially difficult in Catalonia. The Workers' Alliance ... declared a general strike. Luis Companys, president of the Catalan Parliament, proclaimed the Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic ... But at the same time, militants of the CNT and the FAI were arrested ... Solidaridad Obrera was censored. The Catalan libertarians understood that the Catalan nationalists had two objectives in mind: to oppose the central government and to destroy the CNT. Jose Dencas, Counsellor of Defence, issued a strict order: 'Watch out for the FAI' ... Luis Companys broadcast a message on October 5 to all 'citizens regardless of ideology.' However, many anarchosindicalist militants were held by his deputy, Dencas, in the underground cells of police headquarters."* [Op. Cit., pp. 151–2]

Hence the paradoxical situation in which the anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and FAI members found themselves in during this time. The uprising was organised by Catalan fascists who continued to direct their blows against the CNT. As Abel Paz argues, "[f]or the rank and file Catalan worker ... the insurgents ... were actually orienting their action in order to destroy the CNT. After that, how could they collaborate with the reactionary movement which was directing its blows against the working class? Here was the paradox of the Catalan uprising of October 6, 1934." [Durruti: **The People Armed**, p. 158]

In other words, during the Catalan revolt, *"the CNT had a difficult time because the insurgents were its worst enemies."* [Peirats, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 98] However, the complexity of the actual situation does not bother the reader of Morrow's work as it is not reported. Little wonder, as Peirats argues, the *"absurd contention according to which the confederal proletariat of Catalonia betrayed their brethren in Asturias melts away in the face of a truthful narration of the facts."* [**The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 86]

In summary, therefore, Morrow expected the membership of the Catalan CNT and FAI to join in a struggle started and directed by Catalan fascists, whose leaders in the government were arresting and shooting their members, censoring their press, closing their union offices and refusing them a role in the revolt as self-organised forces. We think that sums up the validity of Trotskyism as a revolutionary theory quite well.

In Madrid, the revolt was slightly less farcical. Here the CNT joined the general strike. However, the UGT gave the government 24 hours notice of the general strike, allowing the state to round up

the Socialist “leaders,” seize arm depots and repress the insurrection before it got started [Morrow, *Op. Cit.*, p. 30]. As Bookchin argues, the “massive strike in Madrid, which was supported by the entire left, foundered for want of arms and a revolutionary sense of direction.” [Op. Cit., p. 245] He continues:

*“As usual, the Socialists emerged as unreliable allies of the Anarchists. A revolutionary committee, established by the CNT and FAI to co-ordinate their own operations, was denied direly needed weapons by the UGT. The arms, as it turned out, had been conveniently intercepted by government troops. But even if they had been available, it is almost certain that the Socialists would not have shared them with the Anarchists. Indeed, relationships between the two major sectors of the labour movement had already been poisoned by the failure of the Socialist Youth and the UGT to keep the CNT adequately informed of their plans or confer with Anarchosyndicalist delegates. Despite heavy fighting in Madrid, the CNT and FAI were obliged to function largely on their own. When, at length, a UGT delegate informed the revolutionary committee that Largo Caballero was not interested in common action with the CNT, the committee disbanded.”* [Op. Cit., p. 246]

Bookchin correctly states that “Abad de Santillan was to observe with ample justification that Socialist attempts to blame the failure of the October Insurrection on Anarchist abstention was a shabby falsehood” and quotes Santillan:

*“Can there be talk of abstention of the CNT and censure of it by those who go on strike without warning our organisation about it, who refuse to meet with the delegates of the National Committee [of the CNT], who consent to let the Lerroux-Gil Robles Government take possession of the arms deposits and let them go unused before handing them over to the Confederation and the FAI?”* [Ibid.]

Historian Paul Preston confirms that in Madrid “Socialists and Anarchists went on strike ...” and that “the Socialists actually rejected the participation of Anarchist and Trotskyist groups who offered to help make a revolutionary coup in Madrid.” [The Coming of the Spanish Civil War, p. 174] Moreover, “when delegates travelled secretly to Madrid to try to co-ordinate support for the revolutionary Asturian miners, they were rebuffed by the UGT leadership.” [Graham Kelsey, *Anarchism in Aragon*, p. 73]

Therefore, in two of the three centres of the revolt, the uprising was badly organised. In Catalonia, the revolt was led by fascist Catalan Nationalists who arrested and shot at CNT militants. In Madrid, the CNT backed the strike and was ignored by the Socialists. The revolt itself was badly organised and quickly repressed (thanks, in part, to the actions of the Socialists themselves). Little wonder Peirats asks:

*“Although it seems absurd, one constantly has to ask whether the Socialists meant to start a true revolution [in October 1934] in Spain. If the answer is affirmative, the questions keep coming: Why did they not make the action a national one? Why did they try to do it without the powerful national CNT? Is a peaceful general strike revolutionary? Was what happened in Asturias expected, or were orders exceeded? Did they mean only to scare the Radical-CEDA government with their action?”* [The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution, pp 95–6]

The only real centre of resistance was in Asturias (on the Spanish north coast). Here, the CNT had joined the Socialists and Communists in a “Workers Alliance”. But, against the alliance’s terms, the Socialists alone gave the order for the uprising — and the Socialist-controlled Provincial Committee starved the CNT of arms. This despite the CNT having over 22 000 affiliates in the area (to the UGT’s 40 000). We discuss the activities of the CNT during the revolt in Asturias later (in section 20) and so will do so here.

Morrow states that the “*backbone of the struggle was broken ... when the refusal of the CNT railroad workers to strike enabled the government to transport goods and troops.*” [Morrow, *Op. Cit.*, p. 30] Yet in Asturias (the only area where major troop transportation was needed) the main government attack was from a sea borne landing of Foreign Legion and Moroccan troops — against the port and CNT stronghold (15 000 affiliates) of Gijon (and, we must stress, the Socialists and Communists refused to provide the anarchists of these ports with weapons to resist the troop landings). Hence his claim seems somewhat at odds with the actual events of the October uprising.

Moreover, he seems alone in this claim. No other historian (for example, Hugh Thomas in *The Spanish Civil War*, Raymond Carr in *Spain: 1808–1975*, Paul Preston in *The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, Gabriel Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931–1939*) makes this claim. But, of course, these are not Trotskyists and so can be ignored. However, for objective readers such an omission might be significant.

Indeed, when these other historians **do** discuss the crushing of the Asturias they all stress the fact that the troops came from the sea. For example, Paul Preston notes that “[w]ith CEDA approval, Franco ... insisted on the use of troops from Africa ... they shipped Moorish mercenaries to Asturias.” [*The Coming of the Spanish Civil War*, p. 177] Gabriel Jackson argues that the government “feared to send in the regular Army because of the strong possibility that the Spanish conscripts would refuse to fire on the revolutionaries — or even desert to them. The War Minister ... , acting on the advice of Generals Franco and Goded, sent in contingents of the Moroccan **regulares** and of the Foreign Legions.” These troops arrived “at the ports of Aviles and Gijon.” [*The Spanish Republic and the Civil War: 1931–1939*, p. 157]

Richard A. H. Robinson argues that it “was soon decided that the [Asturias] rebellion could only be crushed by experienced, professional troops. The other areas of Spain could not be denuded of their garrisons in case there were other revolutionary outbreaks. Franco therefore called upon Colonel Yague to lead a force of Moorish regulars to help re-conquer the province from the rebels.” [*The Origins of Franco’s Spain*, pp. 190–1] Stanley G. Payne gives a more detailed account of the state’s attack:

*“Army reinforcements were soon being rushed toward the region ... Eduardo Lopez Ochoa ... head[ed] the main relief column ... he began to make his way eastward [from Galicia] with a modest force of some 360 troops in trucks, half of whom had to be detached on the way to hold the route open. Meanwhile ... in the main Asturian coastal city of Gijon ... reinforcements first arrived by sea on the seventh, followed by larger units from the Moroccan Protectorate on the tenth.”* [*Spain’s First Democracy*, p. 219]

No mention of trains in these accounts, so indicating that Morrow’s assertions are false. The main attack on Asturias, and so the transportation of troops and goods, was by **sea**, not by trains.

In addition, these historians point to other reasons for the defeat of the revolt — the amazingly bad organisation of it by the Socialist Party. Raymond Carr sums up the overwhelming opinion



of the historians when he says that “[a]s a national movement the revolution was a fiasco.” [Op. Cit., p. 633] Hugh Thomas states that the revolt in Catalonia was “crushed nearly as quickly as the general strike had been in Madrid.” [The Spanish Civil War, p. 136] Brennan correctly argues that “[f]rom the moment that Barcelona capitulated and the rising in Madrid fizzled out, the miners were of course doomed.” [Op. Cit., p. 286] The failure of both these revolts was directly attributable to the policies and actions of the Socialists who controlled the “Workers’ Alliances” in both areas. Hence historian Paul Heywood:

*“[A]n important factor which contributed to the strikes’ collapse and made the state’s task easier was the underlying attitude of the Socialists. For all the talk of united action by the Left, the Socialists still wished to dominate any combined moves. Unwilling to cede its traditional hegemony, the PSOE rendered the Alianzas obrera necessarily ineffective ...*

*“Thus, there was little genuine unity on the Spanish Left. Moreover, the strike was very poorly planned. Differences within the PSOE meant that there was no agreement even as to the programme of the strike. For the ... leftists, it represented the initiation of a full-scale Socialist revolution; for ... the centrists in the party, the aim of the strike was to force Alcala-Zamora to reconsider and invite the Socialists back into a coalition government with the Republicans.” [Marxism and the Failure of Organised Socialism in Spain 1879–1936 pp. 144–5]*

Significantly, Heywood argues that “[o]ne thing, however, did emerge from the October strike. The example of Asturias provided a pointed lesson for the Left: crucially, the key to the relative success of the insurrection there was the participation of the CNT in an effective Alianza obrera. Without the CNT, the Asturian rising would have been as short-lived and as easily defeated as those in Madrid and Barcelona.” [Op. Cit., p. 145]

Having discussed both Madrid and Barcelona above, we leave it to the reader to conclude whether Morrow’s comments are correct or whether a more likely alternative explanation for the revolt’s failure is possible.

However, even assuming Morrow’s claims that the failure of the CNT rail workers’ union to continue striking in the face of a completely farcical “revolt” played a key role in its defeat were true, it does not explain many facts. Firstly, the government had declared martial law — placing the railway workers in a dangerous position. Secondly, as Jerome R. Mintz points out, railway workers “were represented by two competing unions — the Sindicato Nacional Ferroviario of the UGT ... and the CNT-affiliated FNIFF ... The UGT ... controlled the large majority of the workers. [In 1933] Trifon Gomez, secretary of the UGT union, did not believe it possible to mobilise the workers, few of whom had revolutionary aspirations.” [The Anarchists of Casa Viejas, p. 178] Outside of Catalonia, the majority of the railway workers belonged to the UGT [Sam Dolgoff, The Anarchist Collectives, p. 90f] Asturias (the only area where major troop transportation was needed) does not border Catalonia — apparently the army managed to cross Spain on a rail network manned by a minority of its workers.

However, these points are of little import when compared to the fact that Asturias the main government attack was, as we mentioned above, from a sea borne landing of Foreign Legion and Moroccan troops. Troops from Morocco who land by sea do not need trains. Indeed, The ports

of Aviles and Gijon were the principle military bases for launching the repression against the uprising.

The real failure of the Asturias revolt did not lie with the CNT, it lay (unsurprisingly enough) with the Socialists and Communists. Despite CNT pleas the Socialists refused arms, Gijon fell after a bloody struggle and became the main base for the crushing of the entire region (*"Arriving at the ports of Aviles and Gijon on October 8, these troops were able to overcome the resistance of the local fishermen and stevedores. The revolutionary committees here were Anarchist dominated. Though they had joined the rising and accepted the slogan UHP [Unity, Proletarian Brothers], the Socialists and Communists of Oviedo clearly distrusted them and had refused arms to their delegate the day before."* [Gabriel Jackson, *Op. Cit.*, p. 157]).

This Socialist and Communist sabotage of Anarchist resistance was repeated in the Civil War, less than two years later.

As can be seen, Morrow's account of the October Insurrection of 1934 leaves a lot to be desired. The claim that the CNT was responsible for its failure cannot withstand a close examination of the events. Indeed, by providing the facts which Morrow does not provide we can safely say that the failure of the revolt across Spain rested squarely with the PSOE and UGT. It was badly organised, they failed to co-operate or even communicate with CNT when aid was offered, they relied upon the enemies of the CNT in Catalonia and refused arms to the CNT in both Madrid and Asturias (so allowing the government force, the main force of which landed by sea, easy access to Asturias). All in all, even if the minority of railway workers in the CNT had joined the strike it would have, in all probability, resulted in the same outcome.

Unfortunately, Morrow's assertions have become commonplace in the ranks of the Left and have become even more distorted in the hands of his Trotskyist readers. For example, we find Nick Wrack arguing that the *"Socialist Party called a general strike and there were insurrectionary movements in Asturias and Catalonia, In Madrid and Catalonia the anarchist CNT stood to one side, arguing that this was a 'struggle between politicians' and did not concern the workers even though this was a strike against a move to incorporate fascism into the government."* He continues, *"[i]n Asturias the anarchist militants participated under the pressure of the masses and because of the traditions of unity in that area. However, because of their abstentionist stupidity, the anarchists elsewhere continued to work, even working trains which brought the Moorish troops under Franco to suppress the Asturias insurrection."* [*"Marxism, Anarchism and the State"*, pp. 31-7, **Militant International Review**, no. 46, p. 34]

Its hard to work out where to start in this travesty of history. We will start with the simple errors. The CNT **did** take part in the struggle in Madrid. As Paul Preston notes, in Madrid the *"Socialists and Anarchists went on strike"* [**The Coming of the Spanish Civil War**, p. 174] In Catalonia, as indicated above, the *"insurrectionary movement"* in Catalonia was organised and lead by Catalan Fascists, who shot upon CNT members when they tried to open their union halls and who arrested CNT and FAI militants the night before the uprising. Moreover, the people organising the revolt had been repressing the CNT for months previously. Obviously attempts by Catalan Fascists to become a government should be supported by socialists, including Trotskyists. Moreover, the UGT and PSOE had worked with the quasi-fascist Primo do Rivera dictatorship during the 1920s. The hypocrisy is clear. So much for the CNT standing *"to one side, arguing that this was a 'struggle between politicians' and did not concern the workers even though this was a strike against a move to incorporate fascism into the government."*

His comments that “*the anarchists ... work[ed] trains which brought the Moorish troops under Franco to suppress the Asturias insurrection*” is just plain silly. It was **not** anarchists who ran the trains, it was railway workers — under martial law — some of whom were in the CNT and some of whom were anarchists. Moreover, as noted above the Moorish troops under Franco arrived **by sea** and not by train. And, of course, no mention of the fact that the CNT-FAI in the strategically key port of Gijon was denied arms by the Socialists and Communists, which allowed the Moorish troops to disembark without real resistance.

Morrow has a lot to answer for.

## 7. Were the Friends of Durruti Marxists?

It is sometimes claimed that the **Friends of Durruti** Group which formed during the Spanish Revolution were Marxists or represented a “*break*” with anarchism and a move towards Marxism. Both these assertions are false. We discuss whether the Friends of Durruti (FoD) represented a “*break*” with anarchism in the following section. Here we indicate that claims of the FoD being Marxists are false.

The Friends of Durruti were formed, in March 1937, by anarchist militants who had refused to submit to Communist-controlled “*militarisation*” of the workers’ militias. During the Maydays — the government attack against the revolution two months later — the Friends of Durruti were notable for their calls to stand firm and crush the counter-revolution. During and after the May Days, the leaders of the CNT asserted that the FoD were Marxists (which was quite ironic as it was the CNT leaders who were acting as Marxists in Spain usually did by joining with bourgeois governments). This was a slander, pure and simple.

The best source to refute claims that the FoD were Marxists (or becoming Marxist) or that they were influenced by, or moved towards, the Bolshevik-Leninists is Agustin Guillamon’s book **The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937–1939**. Guillamon is a Marxist (of the “*left-communist*” kind) and no anarchist (indeed he states that the “*Spanish Revolution was the tomb of anarchism as a revolutionary theory of the proletariat*.” [p. 108]). That indicates that his account can be considered objective and not anarchist wishful thinking. Here we use his work to refute the claims that the FoD were Marxists. Section 9 discusses their links (or lack of them) with the Spanish Trotskyists.

So were the FoD Marxists? Guillamon makes it clear — no, they were not. In his words, “[*t*]here is nothing in the Group’s theoretical tenets, much less in the columns of **El Amigo del Pueblo** [their newspaper], or in their various manifestos and handbills to merit the description ‘*marxist*’ being applied to the Group [by the CNT leadership]. They were simply an opposition to the CNT’s leadership’s collaborationist policy, making their stand within the organisation and upon anarcho-syndicalist ideology.” [p. 61] He stresses this in his conclusion:

*“The Friends of Durruti was an affinity group, like many another existing in anarcho-syndicalist quarters. It was not influenced to any extent by the Trotskyists, nor by the POUM. Its ideology and watchwords were quintessentially in the CNT idiom: it cannot be said that they displayed a marxist ideology at any time ... They were against the abandonment of revolutionary objectives and of anarchism’s fundamental and quintessential ideological principles, which the CNT-FAI leaders had thrown over in favour of anti-fascist unity and the need to adapt to circumstances.”* [p. 107]

In other words, they wanted to return the CNT “to its class struggle roots.” [Ibid.] Indeed, Balias (a leading member of the group and writer of its 1938 pamphlet **Towards a Fresh Revolution**) was moved to challenge the charges of “marxist” levelled at him:

*“I will not repay defamatory comment in kind. But what I cannot keep mum about is that a legend of marxism has been woven about my person and I should like the record put straight ... It grieves me that at the present time there is somebody who dares call me a Marxist when I could refute with unanswerable arguments those who hang such an unjustified label on me. As one who attends our union assemblies and specific gatherings, I might speak of the loss of class sensibility which I have observed on a number of occasions. I have heard it said that we should be making politics — in as many words, comrades — in an abstract sense, and virtually no one protested. And I, who have been aghast at countless such instances, am dubbed a marxist just because I feel, myself to be a one hundred percent revolutionary ... On returning from exile in France in the days of Primo de Rivera ... I have been a defender of the CNT and the FAI ever since. In spite of my paralysis, I have done time in prison and been taken in manacles to Madrid for my fervent and steadfast championship of our organisations and for fighting those who once were friends of mine Is that not enough? ... So where is this marxism of mine? Is it because my roots are not in the factory? ... The time has come to clarify my position. It is not good enough to say that the matter has already been agreed. The truth must shine through. As far as I am concerned, I call upon all the comrades who have used the press to hang this label upon me to spell out what makes me a marxist.”* [El Amigo del Pueblo, no. 4, p. 3]

As can be seen, the FoD were not Marxists. Two more questions arise. Were they a “break” with anarchism (i.e. moving towards Marxism) and were they influenced by the Spanish Trotskyists. We turn to these questions in the next two sections.

## 8. Did the Friends of Durruti “break with” anarchism?

Morrow claims that the Friends of Durruti (FoD) “represented a conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism. They explicitly declared the need for democratic organs of power, juntas or soviets, in the overthrow of capitalism.” [Morrow, Op. Cit., p. 247] The truth of the matter is somewhat different.

Before discussing his assertion in more detail a few comments are required. Typically, in Morrow’s topsy-turvy world, all anarchists like the Friends of Durruti (Morrow also includes the Libertarian Youth, the “politically awakened” CNT rank and file, local FAI groups, etc.) who remained true to anarchism and stuck to their guns (often literally) — represented a break with anarchism and a move towards Marxism, the revolutionary vanguard party (no doubt part of the 4<sup>th</sup> International), and a fight for the “workers state.” Those anarchists, on the other hand, who compromised for “anti-fascist unity” (but mainly to try and get weapons to fight Franco) are the real anarchists because “class collaboration ... lies concealed in the heart of anarchist philosophy.” [Op. Cit., p. 101]

Morrow, of course, would have had a fit if anarchists pointed to the example of the Social Democrat’s who crushed the German Revolution or Stalin’s Russia as examples that “rule by an

*elite lies concealed in the heart of Marxist philosophy.*” It does not spring into Morrow’s mind that those anarchists he praises are the ones who show the revolutionary heart of anarchism. This can best be seen from his comments on the Friends of Durruti, who we argue were not evolving towards “Marxism” but rather were trying to push the CNT and FAI back to its pre-Civil War politics and strategy. Moreover, as we argue in section 12, anarchism has always argued for self-managed working class organisations to carry out and defend a revolution. The FoD were simply following in the tradition founded by Bakunin.

In other words, we will show that they did not “*break with*” anarchism — rather they refused to compromise their anarchism in the face of “*comrades*” who thought winning the war meant entering the government. This is clear from their leaflets, paper and manifesto. Moreover, as will become obvious, their “*break*” with anarchism actually just restates pre-war CNT policy and organisation.

For example, their leaflets, in April 1937, called for the unions and municipalities to “*replace the state*” and for no retreat:

*“We have the organs that must supplant a State in ruins. The Trade Unions and Municipalities must take charge of economic and social life.”* [quoted by Agustin Guillamon, Op. Cit., p. 38]

This clearly is within the CNT and anarcho-syndicalist tradition. Their manifesto, in 1938, repeated this call (“*the state cannot be retained in the face of the unions*”), and made three demands as part of their programme. It is worth quoting these at length:

*“I — Establishment of a Revolutionary Junta or National Defence Council.*

*“This body will be organised as follows: members of the revolutionary Junta will be elected by democratic vote in the union organisations. Account is to be taken of the number of comrades away at the front ... The Junta will steer clear of economic affairs, which are the exclusive preserve of the unions.*

*“The functions of the revolutionary Junta are as follows:*

- a. The management of the war*
- b. The supervision of revolutionary order*
- c. International affairs*
- d. Revolutionary propaganda.*

*“Posts to come up regularly for re-allocation so as to prevent anyone growing attached to them. And the trade union assemblies will exercise control over the Junta’s activities.*

*“II — All economic power to the syndicates.*

*“Since July the unions have supplied evidence of the great capacity for constructive labour... It will be the unions that structure the proletarian economy.*

*“An Economic Council may also be set up, taking into consideration the natures of the Industrial Unions and Industrial federations, to improve on the co-ordination of economic activities.*

“III — Free municipality.

[...]

*“The Municipality shall take charge of those functions of society that fall outside the preserve of the unions. And since the society we are going to build shall be composed exclusively of producers, it will be the unions, no less, that will provide sustenance for the municipalities...”*

*“The Municipalities will be organised at the level of local, comarcal and peninsula federations. Unions and municipalities will maintain liaison at local, comarcal and national levels.” [Towards a Fresh Revolution]*

This programme basically mimics the pre-war CNT policy and organisation and so cannot be considered as a “break” with anarchist or CNT politics or tradition.

Firstly, we should note that the “municipality” was a common CNT expression to describe a “commune” which was considered as “*all the residents of a village or hamlet meeting in assembly (council) with full powers to administer and order local affairs, primarily production and distribution.*” In the cities and town the equivalent organisation was “the union” which “*brings individuals together, grouping them according to the nature of their work ... First, it groups the workers of a factory, workshop or firm together, this being the smallest cell enjoying autonomy with regard to whatever concerns it alone ... The local unions federate with one another, forming a local federation, composed of the committee elected by the unions, and of the general assembly that, in the last analysis, holds supreme sovereignty.*” [Issac Puente, **Libertarian Communism**, p. 25 and p. 24]

In addition, the “*national federations [of unions] will hold as common property the roads, railways, buildings, equipment, machinery and workshops*” and the “*free municipality will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations.*” [Op. Cit., p. 29 and p. 26] Thus Puente’s classic pre-war pamphlet is almost identical to points two and three of the FoD Programme.

Moreover, the “*Economic Council*” urged by the FoD in point two of their programme is obviously inspired by the work of Abad Diego de Santillan, particularly his book **After the Revolution (El Organismo Economico de la Revolucion)**. Discussing the role of the “*Federal Council of Economy*”, de Santillan says that it “*receives its orientation from below and operates in accordance with the resolutions of the regional and national assemblies.*” [p. 86] Just as the CNT Congresses were the supreme policy-making body in the CNT itself, they envisioned a similar body emanating from the rank-and-file assemblies to make the guiding decisions for a socialised economy.

This leaves point one of their programme, the call for a “*Revolutionary Junta or National Defence Council.*” It is here that Morrow and a host of other Marxists claim the FoD broke with anarchism towards Marxism. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Firstly, anarchists have long supported the idea of workers’ councils (or soviets) as an expression of working class power to control their own lives (and so society) — indeed, far longer than Marxists. Thus we find Bakunin arguing that the “*future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.*” Anarchists “*attain this goal ... by the development and organisation, not of the political but of the social (and, by consequence, anti-political) power of the working masses.*” [Michael Bakunin: **Selected**

Writings, p. 206 and p. 198] These councils of workers' delegates (workers' councils) would be the basis of the commune and defence of the revolution:

*"the federative Alliance of all working men's associations ... constitute the Commune ... Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades... [T]he federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction ... it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution."* [Op. Cit., pp. 170–1]

This perspective can be seen in the words of the German anarcho-syndicalist H. Ruediger (member of the IWA's secretariat in 1937) when he argued that for anarchists "social re-organisation, like the defence of the revolution, should be concentrated in the hands of **working class organisations** — whether labour unions or new organs of spontaneous creation, such as free councils, etc., which, as an expression of the will of the workers themselves, from **below up**, should construct the revolutionary social community." [quoted in *The May Days in Barcelona*, Vernon Richards (ed.), p. 71]

Camillo Berneri sums up the anarchist perspective clearly when he wrote:

*"The Marxists ... foresee the natural disappearance of the State as a consequence of the destruction of classes by the means of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat,' that is to say State Socialism, whereas the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State. The Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but the propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines that it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand by the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration — corporate organisations [i.e. industrial unions], communal institutions, both regional and national — freely constituted outside and in opposition to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to a minimum administrative centralisation."* ["Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism", *Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review*, no. 4, p. 52]

In other words, anarchists **do** support democratic organs of power when they are **directly** democratic (i.e. self-managed). "The basic idea of Anarchism is simple," argued Voline, "no party ... placed above or outside the labouring masses ... ever succeeds in emancipating them ... Effective emancipation can only be achieved by the **direct, widespread, and independent action of those concerned, of the workers themselves**, grouped, not under the banner of a political party ... but in their own class organisations (productive workers' unions, factory committees, co-operatives, et cetera) on the basis of concrete action and self-government." [The Unknown Revolution, p. 197]

Anarchists oppose **representative** organs of power as these are governments and so based on minority power and subject to bureaucratic deformations which ensure **un-accountability** from below. Anarchists argue "that, by its very nature, political power could not be exercised except by a very restricted group of men at the centre. Therefore this power — the **real** power — could not belong to the soviets. It would actually be in the hands of the party." [Voline, Op. Cit., p. 213]

Thus Morrow's argument is flawed on the basic point that he does not understand anarchist theory or the nature of an anarchist revolution (also see section 12).

Secondly, and more importantly given the Spanish context, the FoD's vision has a marked similarity to pre-Civil War CNT organisation, policy and vision. This means that the idea of a National Defence Council was not the radical break with the CNT that some claim. Before the civil war the CNT had long had its defence groups, federated at regional and national level. Historian Jerome Mintz provides a good summary:

*"The policies and actions of the CNT were conducted primarily by administrative juntas, beginning with the sindicato, whose junta consisted of a president, secretary, treasurer, and council members. At each step in the confederation, a representative [sic! — delegate] was sent to participate at the next organisational level — from sindicato to the district to the regional confederation, then to the national confederation. In addition to the juntas, however, there were two major committee systems established as adjuncts to the juntas that had developed some autonomy: the **comites pro presos**, or committees for political prisoners, which worked for the release of prisoners and raised money for the relief of their families; and the **comites de defensa**, or defence committees, whose task was to stockpile weapons for the coming battle and to organise the shock troops who would bear the brunt of the fighting."* [The Anarchists of Casas Viejas, p. 141]

Thus we see that the CNT had its "*juntas*" (which means council or committee and so does not imply any authoritarianism) as well as "*defence committees*" which were elected by democratic vote in the union organisations decades before the FoD existed. The Defence Committees (or councils) were a CNT insurgent agency in existence well before July 1936 and had, in fact, played a key role in many insurrections and strikes, including the events of July 1936. In other words, the "*break*" with anarchism Morrow presents was, in fact, an exact reproduction of the way the CNT had traditionally operated and acted — it is the same program of a "*workers defence council*" and "*union management of the economy*" that the CNT had advocated prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. The only "*break*" that **did** occur post 19<sup>th</sup> of July was that of the CNT and FAI ignoring its politics and history in favour of "*anti-fascist unity*" and a UGT "*Workers' Alliance*" with all anti-fascist unions and parties (see section 20).

Moreover, the CNT insurrection of December 1933 had been co-ordinated by a National Revolutionary Committee [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 235]. D.A. Santillan argued that the "*local Council of Economy will assume the mission of defence and raise voluntary corps for guard duty and if need be, for combat*" in the "*cases of emergency or danger of a counter-revolution.*" [After the Revolution, p. 80] During the war itself a CNT national plenum of regions, in September 1936, called for a National Defence Council, with majority union representation and based on Regional Defence Councils. The Defence Council of Aragon, set up soon after, was based on these ideas. The need for co-ordinated revolutionary defence and attack is just common sense — and had been reflected in CNT theory, policy and structure for decades.

An understanding of the basic ideas of anarchist theory on revolution combined with the awareness of the CNT's juntas (administrative councils or committees) had "*defence committees*" associated with them makes it extremely clear that rather than being a "*conscious break with the anti-statism of traditional anarchism*" the FoD's programme was, in fact, a conscious **return** to the anti-statism of traditional anarchism and the revolutionary program and vision of the pre-Civil War CNT.



This is confirmed if we look at the activities of the CNT in Aragon where they formed the “Defence Council of Aragon” in September 1936. In the words of historian Antony Beevor, “[i]n late September delegates from the Aragonese collectives attended a conference at Bujaraloz, near where Durruti’s column was based. They decided to establish a Defence Council of Aragon, and elected as president Joaquin Ascaso.” [Op. Cit., p. 96] In February 1937, the first congress of the regional federation of collectives was held at Caspe to co-ordinate the activities of the collectives — an obvious example of a regional economic council desired by the FoD. Morrow does mention the Council of Aragon — “the anarchist-controlled Council for the Defence of Aragon” [Op. Cit., p. 111] — however, he strangely fails to relate this fact to anarchist politics. After all, in Aragon the CNT-FAI remained true to anarchism, created a defence council and a federation of collectives. If Morrow had discussed the events in Aragon he would have had to draw the conclusion that the FoD were not a “conscious break with the traditional anti-statism of anarchism” but rather were an expression of it.

This can be seen from the comments made after the end of the war by the Franco-Spanish Group of **The Friends of Durruti**. They clearly argued for a return to the principles of anarchism and the pre-war CNT. They argued not only for workers’ self-organisation and self-management as the basis of the revolution but also to the pre-war CNT idea of a workers’ alliance from the bottom up rather than a UGT-style one at the top (see section 5). In their words:

*“A revolution requires the absolute domination of the workers’ organisations as was the case in July, 1936, when the CNT-FAI were masters ... We incline to the view that it is necessary to form a Revolutionary Alliance; a Workers’ Front; where no one would be allowed to enter and take their place except on a revolutionary basis ... “ [The Friends of Durruti Accuse]*

As can be seen, rather than a “revolutionary government” the FoD were consistently arguing for a federation of workers’ associations as the basis of the revolution. In this they were loyally following Bakunin’s basic arguments and the ideas of anarchism. Rather than the FoD breaking with anarchism, it is clear that it was the leading committees of the CNT and FAI which actually broke with the politics of anarchism and the tactics, ideas and ideals of the CNT.

Lastly there are the words of Jaime Balius, one of the FoD’s main activists, who states in 1976 that:

*“We did not support the formation of Soviets; there were no grounds in Spain for calling for such. We stood for ‘all power to the trade unions’. In no way were we politically orientated ... Ours was solely an attempt to save the revolution; at the historical level it can be compared to Kronstadt because if there the sailors and workers called for ‘all power to the Soviets’, we were calling for all power to the unions.” [quoted by Ronald Fraser, Blood of Spain, p. 381]*

“Political” here meaning “state-political” — a common anarchist use of the word. According to Fraser, the “proposed revolutionary junta was to be composed of combatants from the barricades.” [Ibid.] This echoes Bakunin’s comment that the “Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Communal Council composed of one or two delegates from each barricade ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates.” [Op. Cit., pp. 170–1]

As can be seen, rather than calling for power to a party or looking to form a government (i.e. being “*politically orientated*”) the FoD were calling for “*all power to the unions.*” This meant, in the context of the CNT, all power to the union assemblies in the workplace. Decision making would flow from the bottom upwards rather than being delegated to a “*revolutionary*” government as in Trotskyism. To stress the point, the FoD did not represent a “*break*” with anarchism or the CNT tradition. To claim otherwise means to misunderstand anarchist politics and CNT history.

Our analysis, we must note, also makes a mockery of Guillaumon’s claim that because the FoD thought that libertarian communism had to be “*impose[d]*” and “*defended by force of arms*” their position represented an “*evolution within anarchist thought processes.*” [Op. Cit., p. 95] As has been made clear above, from Bakunin onwards revolutionary anarchism has been aware of the need for an insurrection to create an anarchist society by destroying both the state and capitalism (i.e. to “*impose*” a free society upon those who wish hierarchy to continue and are in a position of power) and for that revolution to be defended against attempts to defeat it. Similarly, his claim that the FoD’s “*revolutionary junta*” was the equivalent of what “*others call the vanguard or the revolutionary party*” cannot be defended given our discussion above — it is clear that the junta was not seen as a form of delegated power by rather as a means of defending the revolution like the CNT’s defence committees and under the direct control of the union assemblies.

It may be argued that the FoD did not actually mean this sort of structure. Indeed, their manifesto states that they are “*introducing a slight variation in anarchism into our program. The establishment of a Revolutionary Junta.*” Surely this implies that they saw themselves as having moved away from anarchism and CNT policy? As can be seen from Balius’ comments during and after the revolution, the FoD were arguing for “*all power to the unions*” and stating that “*apolitical anarchism had failed.*” However, “*apolitical*” anarchism came about post-July 19<sup>th</sup> when the CNT-FAI (ignoring anarchist theory and CNT policy and history) **ignored** the state machine rather than destroying it and supplanting it with libertarian organs of self-management. The social revolution that spontaneously occurred after July 19<sup>th</sup> was essentially economic and social (i.e. “*apolitical*”) and not “*anti-political*” (i.e. the destruction of the state machine). Such a revolution would soon come to grief on the shores of the (revitalised) state machine — as the FoD correctly argued had happened.

To state that they had introduced a variation into their anarchism makes sense post-July 1936. The “*apolitical*” line of the CNT-FAI had obviously failed and a new departure was required. While it is clear that the FoD’s “*new*” position was nothing of the kind, it was elemental anarchist principles, it was “*new*” in respect to the policy the CNT (“*anarchism*”) had conducted during the Civil War — a policy they justified by selective use of anarchist theory and principles. In the face of this, the FoD could claim they were presenting a new variation in spite of its obvious similarities to pre-war CNT policies and anarchist theory. Thus the claim that the FoD saw their ideas as some sort of departure from traditional anarchism cannot be maintained, given the obvious links this “*new*” idea had with the past policies and structure of the CNT. As Guillaumon makes it clear, the FoD made “*their stand within the organisation and upon anarcho-syndicalist ideology*” and “[a]t all times the Group articulated an anarcho-syndicalist ideology, although it also voiced radical criticism of the CNT and FAI leadership. But it is a huge leap from that to claiming that the Group espoused marxist positions.” [Op. Cit., p. 61 and p. 95]

One last comment. Morrow states that the “*CNT leadership ... expelled the Friends of Durruti*” [Op. Cit., p. 189] This is not true. The CNT leadership did try to expel the FoD. However, as Balius points out, the “*higher committees order[ed] our expulsion, but this was rejected by the rank and file*

in the trade union assemblies and at a plenum of FAI groups held in the Casa CNT-FAI.” [quoted by Agustín Guillamón, *Op. Cit.*, p. 73] Thus the CNT leadership could never get their desire ratified by any assembly of unions or FAI groups. Unfortunately, Morrow gets his facts wrong (and also presents a somewhat false impression of the relationship of the CNT leadership and the rank and file).

## 9. Were the Friends of Durruti influenced by Trotskyists?

Morrow implies that the Bolshevik-Leninists “*established close contacts with the anarchist workers, especially the ‘Friends of Durruti’*” [*Op. Cit.*, p. 139] The truth, as usual, is somewhat different.

To prove this we must again turn to Guillamón’s work in which he dedicates a chapter to this issue. He brings this chapter by stating:

*“It requires only a cursory perusal of El Amigo del Pueblo or Balius’s statements to establish that the Friends of Durruti were never marxists, nor influenced at all by the Trotskyists or the Bolshevik-Leninist Section. But there is a school of historians determined to maintain the opposite and hence the necessity for this chapter.”* [*Op. Cit.*, p. 94]

He stresses that the FoD “*were not in any way beholden to Spanish Trotskyism is transparent from several documents*” and notes that while the POUM and Trotskyists displayed “*an interest*” in “*bringing the Friends of Durruti under their influence*” this was “*something in which they never succeeded.*” [*Op. Cit.*, p. 96 and p. 110]

Pre-May, 1937, Balius himself states that the FoD “*had no contact with the POUM, nor with the Trotskyists.*” [*Op. Cit.*, p. 104] Post-May, this had not changed as witness E. Wolf letter to Trotsky in July 1937 which stated that it “*will be impossible to achieve any collaboration with them ... Neither the POUMists nor the Friends would agree to the meeting [to discuss joint action].*” [*Op. Cit.*, pp. 97–8]

In other words, the Friends of Durruti did not establish “*close contacts*” with the Bolshevik-Leninists after the May Days of 1937. While the Bolshevik-Leninists may have wished for such contacts, the FoD did not (they probably remembered their fellow anarchists and workers imprisoned and murdered when Trotsky was in power in Russia). They were, of course, contacts of a limited kind but no influence or significant co-operation. Little wonder Balius stated in 1946 that the “*alleged influence of the POUM or the Trotskyists upon us is untrue.*” [quoted, *Op. Cit.*, p. 104]

It is hardly surprising that the FoD were not influenced by Trotskyism. After all, they were well aware of the policies Trotsky introduced when he was in power. Moreover, the program of the Bolshevik-Leninists was similar in rhetoric to the anarchist vision — they differed on the question of whether they actually **meant** “*all power to the working class*” or not (see section 12 and 13). And, of course, the Trotskyists activities during the May Days amounted to little more than demanding that the workers’ do what they were already doing (as can be seen from the leaflet they produced — as George Orwell noted, “*it merely demanded what was happening already*” [*Homage to Catalonia*, p. 221]). As usual, the “*vanguard of the proletariat*” were trying to catch up with the proletariat.

In theory and practice the FoD were miles ahead of the Bolshevik-Leninists — as to be expected, as the FoD were anarchists.

## 10. What does the Friends of Durruti's programme tell us about Trotskyism?

Morrow states that the FoD's "*slogans included the essential points of a revolutionary program: all power to the working class, and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of the workers' power.*" [Op. Cit., p. 133] It is useful to compare Leninism to these points to see if that provides a revolutionary program.

Firstly, as we argue in more detail in section 11, Trotsky abolished the democratic organs of the Red Army. Lenin's rule also saw the elimination of the factory committee movement and its replacement with one-man management appointed from above (see section 17 and Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control** for details). Both these events occurred before the start of the Russian Civil War in May 1918. Moreover, neither Lenin nor Trotsky considered workers' self-management of production as a key aspects of socialism. On this level, Leninism in power did not constitute a "*revolutionary program.*"

Secondly, Leninism does **not** call for "*all power to the working class*" or even "*workers' power*" to manage their own affairs. To quote Trotsky, in an article written in 1937, "*the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard.*" The working classes' role is one of supporting the party:

*"Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power.*

*"In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard."*

Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the "*vanguard*" which takes power — "*a revolutionary party, even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.*" [Stalinism and Bolshevism] So much for "*workers' power*" — unless you equate that with the "*power*" to give your power, your control over your own affairs, to a minority who claim to represent you. Indeed, Trotsky even attacks the idea that workers' can achieve power directly via organs of self-management like workers' councils (or soviets):

*"Those who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [Op. Cit.]

In other words, the dictatorship of the proletariat is, in fact, expressed by "*the party dictatorship.*" In this Trotsky follows Lenin who asserted that:

*"The very presentation of the question — 'dictatorship of the Party **or** dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (Party) of the masses?' — is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind ... [because] classes are usually ... led by political parties..."* [Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder, pp. 25–6]

As has been made clear above, the FoD being anarchists aimed for a society of generalised self-management, a system in which working people directly controlled their own affairs and

so society. As these words by Lenin and Trotsky indicate they did not aim for such a society, a society based on “*all power to the working class.*” Rather, they aimed for a society in which the workers would delegate their power into the hands of a few, the revolutionary party, who would exercise power **on their behalf**. The FoD meant exactly what they said when they argued for “*all power to the working class*” — they did not mean this as a euphemism for party rule. In this they followed Bakunin:

*“[T]he federated Alliance of all labour associations ... will constitute the Commune ... there will be a federation of the standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade ... these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times... An appeal will be issued to all provinces, communes and associations inviting them to follow the example set ... [and] to reorganise along revolutionary lines ... and to then delegate deputies to an agreed place of assembly (all of those deputies invested with binding mandates and accountable and subject to recall), in order to found the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... Thus it is through the very act of extrapolation and organisation of the Revolution with an eye to the mutual defences of insurgent areas that the ... Revolution, founded upon ... the ruins of States, will emerge triumphant...”*

*“Since it is the people which must make the revolution everywhere, and since the ultimate direction of it must at all times be vested in the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial organisations ... being organised from the bottom up through revolutionary delegation ...”* [No God, No Masters, vol. 1, pp. 155–6]

And:

*“Not even as revolutionary transition will we countenance national Conventions, nor Constituent Assemblies, nor provisional governments, nor so-called revolutionary dictatorships: because we are persuaded that revolution is sincere, honest and real only among the masses and that, whenever it is concentrated in the hands of a few governing individuals, it inevitably and immediately turns into reaction.”* [Op. Cit., p. 160]

As can be seen, Bakunin’s vision is precisely, to use Morrow’s words, “*all power to the working class, and democratic organs of the workers, peasants and combatants, as the expression of the workers’ power.*” Thus the Friends of Durruti’s program is not a “*break*” with anarchism (as we discussed in more detail in section 8) but rather in the tradition started by Bakunin — in other words, an anarchist program. It is Leninism, as can be seen, which rejects this “*revolutionary program*” in favour of all power to the representatives of the working class (i.e. party) which it confuses with the working class as a whole.

Given that Morrow asserts that “*all power to the working class*” was an “*essential*” point of “*a revolutionary program*” we can only conclude that Trotskyism does not provide a revolutionary program — rather it provides a program based, at best, on representative government in which the workers’ delegate their power to a minority or, at worse, on party dictatorship **over** the working class (the experience of Bolshevik Russia would suggest the former quickly becomes the latter, and is justified by Bolshevik ideology).

By his own arguments, here as in so many other cases, Morrow indicates that Trotskyism is not a revolutionary movement or theory.

## 11. Why is Morrow's comments against the militarisation of the Militias ironic?

Morrow denounces the Stalinist militarisation of the militias (their "*campaign for wiping out the internal democratic life of the militias*") as follows:

*"The Stalinists early sought to set an 'example' by handing their militias over to government control, helping to institute the salute, supremacy of officers behind the lines, etc..."*

*"The example was wasted on the CNT masses ... The POUM reprinted for distribution in the militias the original Red Army Manual of Trotsky, providing for a democratic internal regime and political life in the army."* [Op. Cit., p. 126]

Morrow states that he supported the "*democratic election of soldiers' committees in each unit, centralised in a national election of soldiers' delegates to a national council.*" Moreover, he attacks the POUM leadership because it "**forbade** election of soldiers' committees" and argued that the "*simple, concrete slogan of elected soldier's committees was the only road for securing proletarian control of the army.*" He attacks the POUM because its "*ten thousand militiamen were controlled bureaucratically by officials appointed by the Central Committee of the party, election of soldiers' committees being expressly forbidden.*" [Op. Cit., p. 127, p. 128 and pp. 136–7]

Again, Morrow is correct. A revolutionary working class militia **does** require self-management, the election of delegates, soldiers' councils and so on. Bakunin, for example, argued that the fighters on the barricades would take a role in determining the development of the revolution as the "*Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades ... composed of one or two delegates from each barricade ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates.*" This would complement "*the federative Alliance of all working men's [and women's] associations ... which will constitute the Commune.*" [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, pp. 170–1] That is **exactly** why the CNT militia organised in this fashion (and, we must note, they were only applying the organisational principles of the CNT and FAI — i.e. anarchism — to the militias). The militia columns were organised in a libertarian fashion from the bottom up:

*"The establishment of war committees is acceptable to all confederal militias. We start from the individual and form groups of ten, which come to accommodations among themselves for small-scale operations. Ten such groups together make up one centuria, which appoints a delegate to represent it. Thirty centurias make up one column, which is directed by a war committee, on which the delegates from the centurias have their say... although every column retains its freedom of action, we arrive at co-ordination of forces, which is not the same thing as unity of command."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, pp. 256–7]

In other words, Morrow is arguing for an **anarchist** solution to the problem of defending the revolution and organising those who were fighting fascism. We say anarchist for good reason.

What is ironic about Morrow's comments and description of "workers' control of the army" is that these features were **exactly** those eliminated by Trotsky when he created the Red Army in 1918! Indeed, Trotsky acted in **exactly** the same way as Morrow attacks the Stalinists for acting (and they used many of the same arguments as Trotsky did to justify it).

As Maurice Brinton correctly summarises:

*"Trotsky, appointed Commissar of Military Affairs after Brest-Litovsk, had rapidly been reorganising the Red Army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire had been re-stored. So, more gradually, had saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers. Democratic forms of organisation, including the election of officers, had been quickly dispensed with."* [The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, p. 37]

He notes that "[f]or years, Trotskyist literature has denounced these reactionary facets of the Red Army as examples of what happened to it 'under Stalinism.'" [Op. Cit., p. 37f] This claim was, amazingly enough, also made by Trotsky himself. In 1935 he re-wrote history by arguing that "[i]n the fire of the cruel struggle [of the Civil War], there could not be even a question of a privileged position for officers: the very word was scrubbed out of the vocabulary." Only "after the victories had been won and the passage made to a peaceful situation" did "the military apparatus" try to "become the most influential and privileged part of the whole bureaucratic apparatus" with "the Stalinist bureaucracy ... gradually over the succeeding ten to twelve years" ensuring for them "a superior position" and giving them "ranks and decorations." [How Did Stalin Defeat the Opposition?]

In fact, "ranks and decorations" and "superior" positions were introduced by Trotsky **before** the outbreak of the Civil War in May 1918. Having been responsible for such developments you would think he would remember them!

On March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1918, Trotsky gave a report to the Moscow City Conference of the Communist Party. In this report he stated that "the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree" and that the Bolsheviks "fac[ed] the task of creating a regular Army." Why the change? Simply because the Bolshevik Party held power ("political power is in the hands of the same working class from whose ranks the Army is recruited"). Of course, power was actually held by the Bolshevik party, not the working class, but never fear:

*"Once we have established the Soviet regime, that is a system under which the government is headed by persons who have been directly elected by the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the **appointment** of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet Power."* [Work, Discipline, Order]

Of course, most workers' are well aware that the administration of a trade union usually works against them during periods of struggle. Indeed, so are most Trotskyists as they often denounce the betrayals by that administration. Thus Trotsky's own analogy indicates the fallacy of his argument. Elected officials do not necessarily reflect the interests of those who elected them. That is why anarchists have always supported **delegation** rather than representation combined with

decentralisation, strict accountability and the power of instant recall. In a highly centralised system (as created by the Bolsheviks and as exists in most social democratic trade unions) the ability to recall an administration is difficult as it requires the agreement of **all** the people. Thus there are quite a few grounds for fearing the appointment of commanders by the government — no matter which party makes it up.

If, as Morrow argues, the *“simple, concrete slogan of elected soldier’s committees was the only road for securing proletariat control of the army”* then Trotsky’s regime in the Red Army ensured the defeat of proletarian control of that organisation. The question Morrow raises of who would control the army, the working class or the bourgeois failed to realise the real question — who was to control the army, the working class, the bourgeois or the state bureaucracy. Trotsky ensured that it would be the latter.

Hence Morrow’s own arguments indicate the anti-revolutionary nature of Trotskyism — unless, of course, we decide to look only at what people say and not what they do.

Of course some Trotskyists know what Trotsky actually did when he held power and try and present apologetics for his obvious destruction of soldiers’ democracy. One argues that the *“Red Army, more than any other institution of the civil war years, embodied the contradiction between the political consciousness and circumstantial coercion. On the one hand the creation of a Red Army was a retreat: it was a conscripted not a voluntary army; officers were appointed not elected ... But the Red Army was also filled with a magnificent socialist consciousness.”* [John Rees, *“In Defence of October”*, **International Socialism**, no. 52, pp. 3–82, p. 46]

This argument is somewhat weak for two reasons.

Firstly, the regressive features of the Red Army appeared **before** the start of the Civil War. It was a political decision to organise in this way, a decision **not justified at the time in terms of circumstantial necessity**. Indeed, far from it (like most of the other Bolshevik policies of the period). Rather it was justified under the rather dubious rationale that workers did not need to fear the actions of a workers’ state. Circumstances were not mentioned at all nor was the move considered as a retreat or as a defeat. It was not even considered as a matter of principle.

This perspective was reiterated by Trotsky after the end of the Civil War. Writing in 1922, he argued that:

*“There was and could be no question of controlling troops by means of elected committees and commanders who were subordinate to these committees and might be replaced at any moment ... [The old army] had carried out a social revolution within itself, casting aside the commanders from the landlord and bourgeois classes and establishing organs of revolutionary self-government, in the shape of the Soviets of Soldiers’ Deputies. These organisational and political measures were correct and necessary from the standpoint of breaking up the old army. But a new army capable of fighting could certainly not grow directly out of them ... The attempt made to apply our old organisational methods to the building of a Red Army threatened to undermine it from the very outset ... the system of election could in no way secure competent, suitable and authoritative commanders for the revolutionary army. The Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class. Commanders were selected and tested by the organs of the Soviet power and the Communist Party. Election of commanders by the units themselves — which were politically ill-educated, being composed of recently mobilised young peasants — would inevitably have been transformed into a game of*



*chance, and would often, in fact, have created favourable circumstances for the machinations of various intriguers and adventurers. Similarly, the revolutionary army, as an army for action and not as an arena of propaganda, was incompatible with a regime of elected committees, which in fact could not but destroy all centralised control.” [The Path of the Red Army]*

If a “*circumstantial*” factor exists in this rationale, it is the claim that the soldiers were “*politically ill-educated*.” However, **every** mass movement or revolution **starts** with those involved being “*politically ill-educated*.” The very process of struggle educates them politically. A key part of this radicalisation is practising self-management and self-organisation — in other words, in participating in the decision making process of the struggle, by discussing ideas and actions, by hearing other viewpoints, electing and mandating delegates. To remove this ensures that those involved **remain** “*politically ill-educated*” and, ultimately, incapable of self-government. It also contains the rationale for continuing party dictatorship:

*“If some people ... have assumed the right to violate everybody’s freedom on the pretext of preparing the triumph of freedom, they will always find that the people are not yet sufficiently mature, that the dangers of reaction are ever-present, that the education of the people has not yet been completed. And with these excuses they will seek to perpetuate their own power.” [Errico Malatesta, Life and Ideas, p. 52]*

In addition, Trotsky’s rationale refutes any claim that Bolshevism is somehow “*fundamentally*” democratic. The ramifications of it were felt everywhere in the soviet system as the Bolsheviks ignored the “*wrong*” democratic decisions made by the working masses and replaced their democratic organisations with appointees from above. Indeed, Trotsky admits that the “*Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class*.” Which means, to state the obvious, appointment from above, the dismantling of self-government, and so on are “*in accordance with the principles*” of Trotskyism. These comments were not made in the heat of the civil war, but afterward during peacetime. Notice Trotsky admits that a “*social revolution*” had swept through the Tsarist army. His actions, he also admits, reversed that revolution and replaced its organs of “*self-government*” with ones identical to the old regime. When that happens it is usually called by its true name, namely **counter-revolution**.

For a Trotskyist, therefore, to present themselves as a supporter of self-managed militias is the height of hypocrisy. The Stalinists repeated the same arguments used by Trotsky and acted in exactly the same way in their campaign against the CNT and POUM militias. Certain acts have certain ramifications, no matter who does them or under what government. In other words, abolishing democracy in the army will generate autocratic tendencies which will undermine socialistic ones **no matter who does it**. The same means cannot be used to serve different ends as there is an intrinsic relationship between the instruments used and the results obtained — that is why the bourgeoisie do not encourage democracy in the army or the workplace! Just as the capitalist workplace is organised to produce proletarians and capital along with cloth and steel, the capitalist army is organised to protect and reinforce minority power. The army and the capitalist workplace are not simply means or neutral instruments. Rather they are social structures which generate, reinforce and **protect** specific social relations. This is what the Russian masses instinctively realised and conducted a social-revolution in both the army and workplace

to **transform** these structures into ones which would enhance rather than crush freedom and working class autonomy. The Bolsheviks reversed these movements in favour of structures which reproduced capitalist social relationships and **justified it in terms of “socialism.”** Unfortunately, capitalist means and organisations would only generate capitalist ends.

It was for these reasons that the CNT and its militias were organised from the bottom up in a self-managed way. It was the only way **socialists** and a socialist society could be created — that is why anarchists are anarchists, we recognise that a socialist (i.e. libertarian) society cannot be created by authoritarian organisations. As the justly famous Sonvillier Circular argued “[h]ow could one expect an egalitarian society to emerge out of an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible.” [quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 61] Just as the capitalist state cannot be utilised by the working class for its own ends, capitalist/statist organisational principles such as appointment, autocratic management, centralisation and delegation of power and so on cannot be utilised for social liberation. They are not designed to be used for that purpose (and, indeed, they were developed in the first place to stop it and enforce minority rule!).

In addition, to abolish democracy on the pretext that people are not ready for it ensures that it will never exist. Anarchists, in contrast, argue that “[o]nly freedom or the struggle for freedom can be the school for freedom.” [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, p. 59]

Secondly, how can a “*socialist consciousness*” be encouraged, or continue to exist, without socialist institutions to express it? Such a position is idealistic nonsense, expressing the wishful notion that the social relationships people experiences does not impact on those involved. In effect, Rees is arguing that as long as the leaders have the “*right ideas*” it does not matter how an organisation is structured. However, how people develop, the ideas they have in their heads, are influenced by the relations they create with each other — autocratic organisations do not encourage self-management or socialism, they produce bureaucrats and subjects.

An autocratic organisation **cannot** encourage a socialist consciousness by its institutional life, only in spite of it. For example, the capitalist workplace encourages a spirit of revolt and solidarity in those subject to its hierarchical management and this is expressed in direct action — by **resisting** the authority of the boss. It only generates a socialist perspective via resistance to it. Similarly with the Red Army. Education programs to encourage reading and writing does not generate socialists, it generates soldiers who are literate. If these soldiers do not have the institutional means to manage their own affairs, a forum to discuss political and social issues, then they remain order takers and any socialist conscious will wither and die.

The Red Army was based on the fallacy that the structure of an organisation is unimportant and it is the politics of those in charge that matter (Marxists make a similar claim for the state, so we should not be too surprised). However, it is no co-incidence that bourgeois structures are always hierarchical — self-management is a politically educational experience which erodes the power of those in charge and transforms those who do it. It is to stop this development, to protect the power of the ruling few, that the bourgeois always turn to centralised, hierarchical structures — they reinforce elite rule. You cannot use the same form of organisation and expect different results — they are designed that way for a reason! To twitter on about the Red Army being “*filled with a magnificent socialist consciousness*” while justifying the elimination of the only means by which that consciousness could survive, prosper and grow indicates a complete lack of socialist politics and any understanding of materialist philosophy.

Moreover, one of the basic principles of the anarchist militia was equality between all members. Delegates received the same pay, ate the same food, wore the same clothes as the rest of the unit.

Not so in the Red Army. Trotsky thought, when he was in charge of it, that inequality was “in some cases ... quite explicable and unavoidable” and that “[e]very Red Army warrior fully accepts that the commander of his unit should enjoy certain privileges as regards lodging, means of transport and even uniform.” [More Equality!]

Of course, Trotsky would think that, being the head commander of the Army. Unfortunately, because soldier democracy had been abolished by decree, we have no idea whether the rank and file of the Red Army agreed with him. For Trotsky, privilege “is, in itself, in certain cases, inevitable” but “[o]stentatious indulgence in privilege is not just evil, it is a crime.” Hence his desire for “more” equality rather than equality — to aim for “eliminating the most abnormal [!] phenomena, softening [!] the inequality that exists” rather than abolish it as they did in the CNT militias. [Op. Cit.]

But, of course, such inequalities that existed in the Red Army are to be expected in an autocratically run organisation. The inequality inherent in hierarchy, the inequality in power between the order giver and order taker, will, sooner or later, be reflected in material inequality. As happened in the Red Army (and all across the “workers’ state”). All Trotsky wanted was for those in power to be respectable in their privilege rather than showing it off. The anarchist militias did not have this problem because being libertarian, delegates were subject to recall and power rested with the rank and file, **not** an elected government.

As another irony of history, Morrow quotes a Bolshevik-Leninist leaflet (which “points the road”) as demanding “[e]qual pay for officers and soldiers.” [Op. Cit., p. 191] Obviously these good Trotskyists had no idea what their hero actually wrote on this subject or did when in power. We have to wonder how long their egalitarian demands would have survived once they had acquired power — if the experience of Trotsky in power is anything to go by, not very long.

Trotsky did not consider how the abolition of democracy and its replacement with an autocratic system would effect the morale or consciousness of the soldiers subject to it. He argued that in the Red Army “the **best** soldier does not mean at all the **most submissive and uncomplaining**.” Rather, “the best soldier will nearly always be sharper, more observant and critical than the others... by his critical comments, based on facts accessible to all, he will pretty often undermine the prestige of the commanders and commissars in the eyes of the mass of the soldiers.” However, not having a democratic army the soldiers could hardly express their opinion other than rebellion or by indiscipline. Trotsky, however, adds a comment that makes his praise of critical soldiers seem less than sincere. He states that “counter-revolutionary elements, agents of the enemy, make conscious and skilful use of the circumstances I have mentioned [presumably excessive privilege rather than critical soldiers, but who can tell] in order to stir up discontent and intensify antagonism between rank and file and the commanding personnel.” [Op. Cit.] The question, of course, arises of who can tell the difference between a critical soldier and a “counter-revolutionary element”? Without a democratic organisation, soldiers are dependent (as in any other hierarchy) on the power of the commanders, commissars and, in the Red Army, the Bolshevik Secret Police (the Cheka). In other words, members of the very class of autocrats their comments are directed against.

Without democratic organisation, the Red Army could never be a means for creating a socialist society, only a means of reproducing autocratic organisation. The influence of the autocratic organisation created by Trotsky had a massive impact on the development of the Soviet State. According to Trotsky himself:

*“The demobilisation of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war. Thus on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country.” [The Revolution Betrayed]*

Obviously Trotsky had forgotten who created the regime in the Red Army in the first place! He also seems to have forgotten that after militarising the Red Army, he turned his power to militarising workers (starting with the railway workers). He also forgets that Lenin had been arguing that workers’ must “**unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour**” from April 1918 along with granting “individual executives dictatorial power (or ‘unlimited’ powers)” and that “the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers” was, in fact, “in general compatible with the fundamental principles of Soviet government” simply because “the history of revolutionary movements” had “shown” that “the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of revolutionary classes.” He notes that “[u]ndoubtedly, the dictatorship of individuals was compatible with bourgeois democracy.” [The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government, p. 34 and p. 32]

In other words, Lenin urged the creation of, and implemented, **bourgeois** forms of workplace management based on the appointment of managers from above. To indicate that this was not in contradiction with Soviet principles, he points to the example of **bourgeois** revolutions! As if bourgeois methods do not reflect bourgeois interests and goals. In addition, these “dictators” were given the same autocratic powers Trotsky claimed the demobilisation of the Red Army four years later had “persistently introduced everywhere.” Yes, “on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country” but the process had started immediately after the October Revolution and was urged and organised by Lenin and Trotsky before the Civil War had started.

Lenin’s support for appointment of (“dictatorial”) managers from above makes Trotsky’s 1922 comment that the “Red Army was built from above, in accordance with the principles of the dictatorship of the working class” take on a new light. [The Path of the Red Army] After all, Lenin argued for an economy system built from above via the appointment of managers before the start of the Civil War. The Red Army was created from above via the appointment of officers before the start of the Civil War. Things had certainly changed since Lenin had argued in **The State and Revolution** that “[a]ll officials, without exception, [would be] elected and subject to recall **at any time**.” This would “serve as the bridge between capitalism and socialism.” [The Essential Lenin, p. 302] One major difference, given Trotsky’s rationales, seems to be that the Bolsheviks were now in power and so election and recall without exception could be forgotten and replaced by appointment.

In summary, Trotsky’s argument against functional democracy in the Red Army could, and was, used to justify the suppression of any democratic decision or organisation of the working class the Bolshevik government disapproved of. He used the same argument, for example, to justify the undermining of the Factory Committee movement and the struggle for workers’ control in favour of one-man management — the form of management in the workplace was irrelevant as the workers’ were now citizens of a workers’ state and under a workers’ government (see section 17). Needless to say, a state which eliminates functional democracy in the grassroots will

not stay democratic for long (and to remain the sovereign power in society, any state will have to eliminate it or, at the very least, bring it under central control — as institutionalised in the USSR constitution of 1918).

Instead of seeing socialism as a product of free association, of working class self-organisation from the bottom up by self-managed organisations, Trotsky saw it as a centralised, top-down system. Of course, being a democrat of sorts he saw the Bolshevik Government as being elected by the mass of the population (or, more correctly, he saw it being elected by the national congress of soviets). However, his vision of centralisation of power provided the rationale for destroying functional democracy in the grass-roots — and without healthy roots, any plant will wither and die. Little wonder, then, that the Bolshevik experiment proved such a disaster — yes, the civil war did not help but the logic of Bolshevism has started to undermine working class self-management **before** is started.

Thus Trotsky's argument that the democratic nature of a workers' army or militia is irrelevant because a "*workers' state*" exists is flawed on many different levels. And the experience of Trotsky in power indicates well the poverty of Trotskyism and Morrow's criticism of the CNT — his suggestion for a self-managed militia is pure anarchism with nothing to do with Leninism and the experience of Bolshevism in power.

## 12. What is ironic about Morrow's vision of revolution?

Equally ironic as Morrow's comments concerning democratic militias (see last section) is his argument that the revolution needed to "*give the factory committees, militia committees, peasant committees, a democratic character, by having them elected by all workers in each unit; to bring together these elected delegates in village, city, regional councils ... [and] a national congress.*" [Op. Cit., p. 100]

Such a position is correct, such developments were required to ensure the success of the revolution. However, it is somewhat ironic that a Trotskyist would present them as somehow being opposed to anarchism when, in fact, they are pure anarchism. Indeed, anarchists were arguing in favour of workers' councils more than five decades before Lenin discovered the importance of the Russian Soviets in 1917. Moreover, as we will indicate, what is even more ironic is the fact that Trotskyism does not actually see these organs as an expression of working class self-management and power but rather as a means of the party to take power. In addition, we must also note that it was Lenin and Trotsky who helped undermine the Russian workers' factory committees, militia committees and so on in favour of party rule. We will discuss each of these ironies in turn.

Firstly, as noted, such Morrow's stated position is exactly what Bakunin and the anarchist movement had been arguing since the 1860s. To quote Bakunin:

*"the federative alliance of all working men's associations ... constitute the Commune ... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first **reorganising** on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricul-*

*tural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation...* “ [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 170–2]

*“The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.”* [Op. Cit., p. 206]

Here is Kropotkin presenting the same vision:

*“independent Communes for the territorial organisation, and of federations of Trade Unions [i.e. workplace associations] for the organisation of men [and women] in accordance with their different functions... [and] free combines and societies ... for the satisfaction of all possible and imaginable needs, economic, sanitary, and educational; for mutual protection, for the propaganda of ideas, for arts, for amusement, and so on.”* [Peter Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 79]

*“the complete independence of the Communes, the Federation of free communes and the social revolution in the communes, that is to say the formation of associated productive groups in place of the state organisation.”* [quoted by Camillo Berneri, **Peter Kropotkin: His Federalist Ideas**]

Bakunin also mentions that those defending the revolution would have a say in the revolutionary structure — the *“Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades and by the creation of a Revolutionary Council composed of ... delegates from each barricade ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates.”* [Op. Cit., p. 171] This obviously parallels the democratic nature of the CNT militias.

Interestingly enough, Marx commented that *“odd barricades, these barricades of the Alliance [Bakunin’s anarchist organisation], where instead of fighting they spend their time writing mandates.”* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 111] Obviously the importance of militia self-management was as lost on him as it was on Lenin and Trotsky — under Marx’s state would its defenders just be cannon-fodder, obeying their government and officers without the ability to help determine the revolution they were fighting for? Apparently so. Moreover, Marx quotes Bakunin’s support for *“responsible and recallable delegates, vested with their imperative mandates”* without commenting on the fact Bakunin **predicts** those features of the Paris Commune Marx praised in his **Civil War in France** by a number of years. Looks like Morrow is not the first Marxist to appropriate anarchist ideas without crediting their source.

As can be seen, Morrow’s suggestion on how to push the Spanish Revolution forward just repeats the ideas of anarchism. Any one familiar with anarchist theory would not be surprised by this as they would know that we have seen a free federation of workplace and communal associations as the basis of a revolution and, therefore, a free society since the time of Proudhon. Thus Morrow’s “Trotskyist” vision of a federation of workers’ council actually reproduces basic anarchist ideas, ideas which pre-date Lenin’s support for soviets as the basis of his *“workers’ state”* by over half a century (we will indicate the fundamental difference between the anarchist vision and the Trotskyist in due course).

As an aside, these quotes by Bakunin and Kropotkin make a mockery of Lenin’s assertion that anarchists do not analysis *“what to put in the place of what has been destroyed [i.e. the old state*

*machine] and how*” [Essential Works of Lenin, p. 362] Anarchists have always suggested a clear answer to what we should “replace” the state with — namely free federations of working class organisations created in the struggle against capital and state. To state otherwise is to either be ignorant of anarchist theory or seek to deceive.

Some anarchists like Bakunin and the anarcho-syndicalists and collectivists saw these organisations being based primarily on libertarian labour unions complemented by whatever organisations were created in the process of revolution (“*The future society must be nothing else than the universalisation of the organisation that the International has formed for itself*” — “*The Sonvillier Circular*” echoing Bakunin, quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 61] Others like Kropotkin and anarcho-communists saw it as a free federation of organisations created by the process of revolution itself. While anarchists did not present a blueprint of what would occur after the revolution (and rightly so) they did provide a general outline in terms of a decentralised, free federation of self-managed workers’ associations as well as linking these future forms of working class self-government with the forms generated in the current class struggle in the here and now.

Similarly, Lenin’s other assertion that anarchists do not study “*the concrete lessons of previous proletarian revolutions*” [Ibid.] is equally baseless, as any one reading, say, Kropotkin’s work would soon realise (for example, **The Great French Revolution, Modern Science and Anarchism** or his pamphlet “*Revolutionary Government*”). Starting with Bakunin, anarchists analysed the experiences of the Paris Commune and the class struggle itself to generalise political conclusions from them (for example, the vision of a free society as a federation of workers’ associations is clearly a product of analysing the class struggle and looking at the failures of the Commune). Given that Lenin states in the same work that “*anarchists had tried to claim the Paris Commune as their ‘own’*” [p. 350] suggests that anarchists **had** studied the Paris Commune and he was aware of that fact. Of course, Lenin states that we had “*failed to give ... a true solution*” to its lessons — given that the solution anarchists proposed was a federation of workers councils to smash the state and defend the revolution his comments seem strange as this, according to **The State and Revolution**, is the “Marxist” solution as well (in fact, as we will soon see, Lenin played lip service to this and instead saw the solution as government by his party rather than the masses as a whole).

Thus, Morrow’s vision of what was required for a successful revolution parallels that of anarchism. We shall now discuss where and how they differ.

The essential difference between the anarchist and Trotskyist vision of workers’ councils as the basis of a revolution is what role these councils should play. For anarchists, these federations of self-managed assemblies is the actual framework of the revolution (and the free society it is trying to create). As Murray Bookchin puts it:

*“There can be no separation of the revolutionary process from the revolutionary goal. A society based on self-administration must be achieved by means of self-administration ... Assembly and community must arise from within the revolutionary process itself; indeed, the revolutionary process must be the formation of assembly and community, and with it, the destruction of power. Assembly and community must become ‘fighting words,’ not distinct panaceas. They must be created as modes of struggle against the existing society, not as theoretical or programmatic abstractions... The factory committees ... must be managed directly by workers’ assemblies in the facto-*

*ries... neighbourhood committees, councils and boards must be rooted completely in the neighbourhood assemble. They must be answerable at every point to the assembly, they and their work must be under continual review by the assembly; and finally, their members must be subject to immediate recall by the assembly. The specific gravity of society, in short, must be shifted to its base — the armed people in permanent assembly.”* [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, pp. 167–9]

Thus the anarchist social revolution sees workers’ councils as organs of working class self-management, the means by which they control their own lives and create a new society based on their needs, visions, dreams and hopes. They are not seen as means by which others, the revolutionary party, seized power **on behalf** of the people as Trotskyists do.

Harsh words? No, as can be seen from Morrow who is quite clear on the role of working class organisation — it is seen purely as the means by which the party can take power. As he argues, there is “*no magic in the soviet form: it is merely the most accurate, most quickly reflecting and responsively changing form of political representation of the masses... It would provide the arena in which the revolutionary party can win the support of the working class.*” [Op. Cit., p. 136]

He states that initially the “*reformist majority in the executive committee would decline the assumption of state power. But the workers could still find in the soviets their natural organs of struggle until the genuinely revolutionary elements in the various parties banded together to win a revolutionary majority in the congress and establish a workers’ state.*” In other words, the “*workers’ state, the dictatorship of the proletariat ... can only be brought into existence by the direct, **political** intervention of the masses, through the factory and village councils (soviets) at that point where a majority in the soviets is wielded by the workers’ party or parties which are determined to overthrow the bourgeois state. Such was the basic theoretical contribution of Lenin.*” [Op. Cit., p. 100 and p. 113]

From an anarchist perspective, this indicates well the fundamental difference between anarchism and Trotskyism. For anarchists, the existence of an “*executive committee*” indicates that the workers’ council do not, in fact, have power in society — rather it is the minority in the executive committee who have been delegated power. Rather than govern themselves and society directly, workers are turned into voters implementing the decisions their leaders have made on their behalf. If revolutionary bodies like workers’ councils **did** create a “*workers’ state*” (as Morrow recommends) then their power would be transferred and centralised into the hands of a so-called “*revolutionary*” government. In this, Morrow follows his guru Trotsky:

*“the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity. In the revolutionary vanguard, organised in a party, is crystallised the aspirations of the masses to obtain their freedom. Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power.*

*“In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard.”* [Trotsky, **Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

Thus, rather than the working class as a whole “seizing power”, it is the “*vanguard*” which takes power — “*a revolutionary party, even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign*



ruler of society.” [Ibid.] He mocks the anarchist idea that a socialist revolution should be based on the self-management of workers within their own autonomous class organisations:

*“Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat.”* [Trotsky, Op. Cit., p. 18]

In this he followed comments made when he was in power. In 1920 he argued that “[w]e have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorships of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the ... party ... [that] the Soviets ... [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this ‘substitution’ of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class.” [Terrorism and Communism, p. 109] Any claims that Trotsky’s infamously authoritarian (indeed dictatorial) politics were a temporary aberration caused by the necessities of the Russian Civil War are refuted by these quotes — 17 years later he was still arguing the same point.

He had the same vision of party dictatorship being the basis of a revolution in 1924. Commenting on the Bolshevik Party conference of April 1917, he states that “whole of ... Conference was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (anybody and everybody) to complete the democratic revolution? ... Lenin’s position was this: ... the capture of the soviet majority; the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the seizure of power through the soviets.” Note, **through** the soviets not **by** the soviets thus indicating the fact the Party would hold the real power, not the soviets of workers’ delegates. Moreover, he states that “to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us.” He continued by noting that it was “one thing to prepare an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the seizure of power by the party, and quite another thing to prepare and then carry out an insurrection under the slogan of defending the rights of the Congress of Soviets.” The Soviet Congress just provided “the legal cover” for the Bolshevik plans rather than a desire to see the Soviets actually start managing society. [The Lessons of October]

We are not denying that Trotskyists do aim to gain a majority within working class conferences. That is clear. Anarchists also seek to gain the support of the mass of the population. It is what they do next that counts. Trotskyists seek to create a government above these organisations and dominate the executive committees that requires. Thus power in society shifts to the top, to the leaders of the centralised party in charge of the centralised state. The workers’ become mere electors rather than actual controllers of the revolution. Anarchists, in contrast, seek to dissolve power back into the hands of society and empower the individual by giving them a direct say in the revolution through their workplace, community and militia assemblies and their councils and conferences.

Trotskyists, therefore, advocate workers councils because they see them as **the** means the vanguard party can take power. Rather than seeing socialism or “workers’ power” as a society in which everyone would directly control their own affairs, Trotskyists see it in terms of working

class people delegating their power into the hands of a government. Needless to say, the two things are not identical and, in practice, the government soon turns from being the people's servant into its master.

It is clear that Morrow always discusses workers councils in terms of the strategy and program of the party, not the value that workers councils have as organs of direct workers control of society. He clearly advocates workers councils because he sees them as the best way for the vanguard party to rally workers around its leadership and organise the seizure of state power. At no time does he see them as means by which working class people can govern themselves directly — quite the reverse.

The danger of such an approach is obvious. The government will soon become isolated from the mass of the population and, due to the centralised nature of the state, difficult to hold accountable. Moreover, given the dominant role of the party in the new state and the perspective that it is the workers' vanguard, it becomes increasingly likely that it will place its power before that of those it claims to represent.

Certainly Trotsky's role in the Russian revolution tells us that the power of the party was more important to him than democratic control by workers through mass bodies. When the workers and sailors of the Kronstadt navy base rebelled in 1921, in solidarity with striking workers in Petrograd, they were demanding freedom of the press for socialist and anarchist groups and new elections to the soviets. But the reaction of the Bolshevik leadership was to crush the Kronstadt dissent in blood. Trotsky's attitude towards workers democracy was clearly expressed at the time:

*"They [the dissent Bolsheviks of the Workers' Opposition] have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the worker's democracy!"*

He spoke of the "revolutionary historic birthright of the Party" and that it "is obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy." [quoted by M. Brinton, *Op. Cit.*, p. 78]

This perspective naturally follows from Trotsky's vanguardist politics. For Leninists, the party is the bearer of "socialist consciousness" and, according to Lenin in **What is to be Done?**, workers, by their own efforts, can only achieve a "trade union" consciousness and, indeed, "there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of workers in the process of their struggle" and so "**the only choice is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology**" (the latter being developed not by workers but by the "bourgeois intelligentsia"). [**Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 82 and p. 74] To weaken or question the party means to weaken or question the socialist nature of the revolution and so weaken the "dictatorship of the proletariat." Thus we have the paradoxical situation of the "proletarian dictatorship" repressing workers, eliminating democracy and maintaining itself against the "passing moods" of the workers (which means rejecting what democracy is all about). Hence Lenin's comment at a conference of the Cheka (his political police) in 1920:

*"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the*

*other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves.*” [Collected Works, vol. 24, p. 170]

Significantly, of the 17 000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40 913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants or workers. [George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin’s Political Police*, p. 178] Needless to say, Lenin failed to mention this aspect of his system in *The State and Revolution* (a failure shared by Morrow and later Trotskyists).

It is hard to combine these facts and Lenin’s and Trotsky’s comments with the claim that the “workers’ state” is an instrument of class rule — after all, Lenin is acknowledging that coercion will be exercised against members of the working class as well. The question of course arises — who decides what a “wavering” or “unstable” element is? Given their comments on the role of the party and the need for the party to assume power, it will mean in practice whoever rejects the government’s decisions (for example, strikers, local soviets who reject central decrees and instructions, workers who vote for anarchists or parties other than the Bolshevik party in elections to soviets, unions and so on, socialists and anarchists, etc.). Given a hierarchical system, Lenin’s comment is simply a justification for state repression of its enemies (including elements within or even the whole working class).

It could be argued, however, that workers could use the soviets to recall the government. However, this fails for two reasons (we will ignore the question of the interests of the bureaucratic machine which will inevitably surround a centralised body — see section H.3.9 for further discussion).

Firstly, the Leninist state will be highly centralised, with power flowing from the top-down. This means that in order to revoke the government, all the soviets in all parts of the country must, at the same time, recall their delegates and organise a national congress of soviets (which, we stress, is not in permanent session). The local soviets are bound to carry out the commands of the central government (to quote the Soviet constitution of 1918 — they are to “*carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power*”). Any independence on their part would be considered “wavering” or an expression of “unstable” natures and so subject to “*revolutionary coercion*”. In a highly centralised system, the means of accountability is reduced to the usual bourgeois level — vote in the general election every few years (which, in any case, can be annulled by the government to ensure that the soviets do not go back into the “*mud*” via the “*passing moods*” caused by the “*insufficient cultural level of the masses*”). In other words, the soviet form may be the “*most accurate, most quickly reflecting and responsively changing form of political representation of the masses*” (to use Morrow’s words) but only **before** they become transformed into state organs.

Secondly, “*revolutionary coercion*” against “wavering” elements does not happen in isolation. It will encourage critical workers to keep quiet in case they, too, are deemed “unstable” and become subject to “*revolutionary*” coercion. As a government policy it can have no other effect than deterring democracy.

Thus Trotskyist politics provides the rationale for eliminating even the limited role of soviets for electing representatives they hold in that ideology.

Morrow argues that “[o]ne must never forget ... that soviets **do not begin** as organs of state power” rather they start as “organs defending the workers’ daily interests” and include “powerful strike committees.” [Op. Cit., p. 136] That is true, initially workers’ councils are expressions of working class power and are organs of working class self-management and self-activity. They are subject to direct control from below and unite from the bottom up. However, once they are turned into “organs of state power” their role (to re-quote the Soviet constitution of 1918) becomes that of “carry[ing] out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power.” Soviet power is replaced by party power and they become a shell of their former selves — essentially rubber-stamps for the decisions of the party central committee.

Ironically, Morrow quotes the main theoretician of the Spanish Socialist Party as stating “*the organ of the proletarian dictatorship will be the Socialist Party*” and states that they “were saying precisely what the anarchist leaders had been accusing both communists and revolutionary socialists of meaning by the proletarian dictatorship.” [Op. Cit., p. 99 and p. 100] This is hardly surprising, as this was what the likes of Lenin and Trotsky **had** been arguing. As well as the quotes we have provided above, we may add Trotsky’s comment that the “*fundamental instrument of proletarian revolution is the party.*” [Lessons of October] And the resolution of the Second World Congress of the Communist International which stated that “[e]very class struggle is a political struggle. The goal of this struggle ... is the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organised and operated except through a political party.” [cited by Duncan Hallas, **The Comintern**, p. 35] In addition, we may quote Lenin’s opinion that:

*“The very presentation of the question — ‘dictatorship of the Party **or** dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (Party) of the masses?’ — is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind ... [because] classes are usually ... led by political parties...”*

And:

*“To go so far in this matter as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid.”*  
[Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder, pp. 25–6 and p. 27]

As Lenin and Trotsky constantly argued, proletarian dictatorship was impossible without the political party of the workers (whatever its name). Indeed, to even discuss any difference between the dictatorship of the class and that of the party just indicated a confused mind. Hence Morrow’s comments are incredulous, particularly as he himself stresses that the soviet form is useful purely as a means of gaining support for the revolutionary party which would take over the executive of the workers’ councils. He clearly is aware that the party is the **essential** organ of proletarian rule from a Leninist perspective — without the dictatorship of the party, Trotsky argues, the soviets fall back into the mud. Trotsky, indeed, stressed this need for the dictatorship of the party rather than of the proletariat in a letter written in 1937:

*“The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to*

*the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history... The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution ... Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be replaced by the 'dictatorship' of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses."* [Trotsky, **Writings 1936–37**, pp. 513–4]

The net result of Bolshevik politics in Russia was that Lenin and Trotsky undermined the self-management of working class bodies during the Russian Revolution and **before** the Civil War started in May 1918. We have already chronicled Trotsky's elimination of democracy and equality in the Red Army (see section 11). A similar fate befell the factory committees (see section 17) and soviet democracy (as noted above). The logic of Bolshevism is such that at no point did Lenin describe the suppression of soviet democracy and workers' control as a defeat (indeed, as far as workers' control went Lenin quickly moved to a position favouring one-man management). We discuss the Russian Revolution in more detail in the appendix on "What happened during the Russian Revolution?" and so will not do so here.

All in all, while Morrow's rhetoric on the nature of the social revolution may sound anarchist, there are important differences between the two visions. While Trotskyists support workers' councils on purely instrumentalist grounds as the best means of gaining support for their party's assumption of governmental power, anarchists see workers' councils as the means by which people can revolutionise society and themselves by practising self-management in all aspects of their lives. The difference is important and its ramifications signify why the Russian Revolution became the "*dictatorship over the proletariat*" Bakunin predicted. His words still ring true:

*"[b]y popular government they [the Marxists] mean government of the people by a small under of representatives elected by the people... [That is,] government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of **former** workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people."* [Statism and Anarchy, p. 178]

It was for this reason that he argued the anarchists do "*not accept, even in the process of revolutionary transition, either constituent assemblies, provisional governments or so-called revolutionary dictatorships; because we are convinced that revolution is only sincere, honest and real in the hands of the masses, and that when it is concentrated in those of a few ruling individuals it inevitably and immediately becomes reaction.*" [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 237] The history of the Russian Revolution proved him right. Hence anarchist support for popular assemblies and federations of workers' councils as the framework of the social revolution rather than as a means to elect a "revolutionary" government.

One last point. We must point out that Morrow's follows Lenin in favouring executive committees associated with workers' councils. In this he actually ignores Marx's (and Lenin's, in **State**

and Revolution) comments that the Paris Commune was “to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time.” [Selected Writings, p. 287] The existence of executive committees was coded into the Soviet Union’s 1918 Constitution. This suggests two things. Firstly, Leninism and Trotskyism differ on fundamental points with Marx and so the claim that Leninism equals Marxism is difficult to support (the existence of libertarian Marxists like Anton Pannekoek and other council communists also disprove such claims). Secondly, it indicates that Lenin’s claims in *State and Revolution* were ignored once the Bolsheviks took power so indicating that use of that work to prove the democratic nature of Bolshevism is flawed.

Moreover, Marx’s support of the fusion of executive and legislative powers is not as revolutionary as some imagine. For anarchists, as Bookchin argues, “[i]n point of fact, the consolidation of ‘executive and legislative’ functions in a single body was regressive. It simply identified the process of policy-making, a function that rightly should belong to the people in assembly, with the technical execution of these policies, a function that should be left to strictly administrative bodies subject to rotation, recall, limitations of tenure ... Accordingly, the melding of policy formation with administration placed the institutional emphasis of classical [Marxist] socialism on centralised bodies, indeed, by an ironical twist of historical events, bestowing the privilege of formulating policy on the ‘higher bodies’ of socialist hierarchies and their execution precisely on the more popular ‘revolutionary committees’ below.” [Toward an Ecological Society, pp. 215–6]

### 13. Why do anarchists reject the Marxist “workers’ state”?

Morrow asserts two “fundamental” tenets of “anarchism” in his book [Op. Cit., pp. 101–2]. Unfortunately for him, his claims are somewhat at odds with reality. Anarchism, as we will prove in section 14, does not hold one of the positions Morrow states it does. The first “tenet” of anarchism he fails to discuss at all and so the reader cannot understand **why** anarchists think as they do. We discuss this “tenet” here.

The first tenet is that anarchism “has consistently refused to recognise the distinction between a bourgeois and a workers’ state. Even in the days of Lenin and Trotsky, anarchism denounced the Soviet Union as an exploiters’ regime.” [Op. Cit., p. 101] It is due to this, he argues, the CNT co-operated with the bourgeois state:

*“The false anarchist teachings on the nature of the state ... should logically have led them [the CNT] to refuse governmental participation in any event ... the anarchists were in the intolerable position of objecting to the necessary administrative co-ordination and centralisation of the work they had already begun. Their anti-statism ‘as such’ had to be thrown off. What **did** remain, to wreck disaster in the end, was their failure to recognise the distinction between a workers’ and a bourgeois state.” [Op. Cit., p. 101]*

Needless to say, Morrow does not bother to explain **why** anarchists consider the bourgeois and workers’ state to be similar. If he did then perhaps his readers would agree with the anarchists on this matter. However, before discussing that we have to address a misrepresentation of Morrow’s. Rather than the expression of anarchist politics, the actions of the CNT were in direct opposition to them. As we showed in the section 12, anarchists see a social revolution in terms of creating federations of workers associations (i.e. workers’ councils). It was this vision that had created the structure of the CNT (as Bakunin had argued, “the organisation of the trade sections and their

*representation in the Chambers of Labour ... bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old one. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself*" [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 255]).

Thus, the social revolution would see the workers' organisation (be they labour unions or spontaneously created organs) "*tak[ing] the revolution into its own hands ... an earnest international organisation of workers' associations ... [would] replac[e] this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie.*" [The Basic Bakunin, p. 110] This is **precisely** what the CNT did not do — rather it decided against following anarchist theory and instead decided to co-operate with other parties and unions in the "*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*" (at least temporarily until the CNT stronghold in Saragossa was liberated by CNT militias). In effect, it created a UGT-like "Alliance" with other anti-fascist parties and unions and rejected its pre-war policy of "unity from below." The CNT and FAI leadership decided not to talk of libertarian communism but only of the fight against fascism. A greater mistake they could not have made.

An anarchist approach in the aftermath of the fascist uprising would have meant replacing the Generalitat with a federal assembly of delegates from workplace and local community assemblies (a Defence Council, to use a CNT expression). Only popular assemblies (not political parties) would be represented (parties would have an influence only in proportion to their influence in the basic assemblies). All the CNT would have had to do was to call a Regional Congress of unions and invite the UGT, independent unions and unorganised workplaces to send delegates to create the framework of this system. This, we must stress, was **not** done. We will discuss why in section 20 and so will refrain from doing so here. However, **because** the CNT in effect "*postponed*" the political aspects of the social revolution (namely, to quote Kropotkin, to "*smash the State and replace it with the Federation [of Communes]*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 259]) the natural result would be exactly as Morrow explains:

*"But isn't it a far cry from the failure to create the organs to overthrow the bourgeoisie, to the acceptance of the role of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie? Not at all ... Without developing soviets — workers' councils — it was inevitable that even the anarchists and the POUM would drift into governmental collaboration with the bourgeoisie."*  
[Op. Cit., pp. 88–9]

As Kropotkin predicted, "*there can be no half-way house: either the Commune is to be absolutely free to endow itself with whatever institutions it wishes and introduce all reforms and revolutions it may deem necessary, or else it will remain ... a mere subsidiary of the State, chained in its every movement.*" [Op. Cit., p. 259] Without an alternative means of co-ordinating the struggle, the CNT would, as Morrow argued, have little choice but to collaborate with the state. However, rather than being a product of anarchist theory, as Morrow states, this came about by **ignoring** that theory (see section 20).

This can be seen from the false alternative used to justify the CNT's and FAI's actions — namely, "*either libertarian communism, which means anarchist dictatorship, or democracy, which means collaboration.*" The creation of libertarian communism is done **from below** by those subject to capitalist and statist hierarchy overthrowing those with power over them by smashing the state machine and replacing it with self-managed organisations as well as expropriating capital and placing it under workers' self-management. As Murray Bookchin argues:

*“Underlying all [the] errors [of the CNT], at least in theoretical terms, was the CNT-FAI’s absurd notion that if it assumed power in the areas it controlled, it was establishing a ‘State.’ As long as the institutions of power consisted of armed workers and peasants as distinguished from a professional bureaucracy, police force, army, and cabal of politicians and judges, they were no[t] a State ... These institutions, in fact comprised a revolutionary people in arms ... not a professional apparatus that could be regarded as a State in any meaningful sense of the term... That the ‘taking of power’ by an armed people in militias, libertarian unions and federations, peasant communes and industrial collectives could be viewed as an ‘anarchist dictatorship’ reveals the incredible confusion that filled the minds of the ‘influential militants.’” [“Looking Back at Spain,” pp. 53–96, **The Radical Papers**, pp. 86–7]*

This perspective explains why anarchists do not see any fundamental difference between a so-called “workers’ state” and the existing state. For anarchists, the state is based fundamentally on hierarchical power — the delegation of power into the hands of a few, of a government, of an “executive” committee. Unlike Lenin, who stressed the “bodies of armed men” aspect of the state, anarchists consider the real question as one of who will tell these “bodies of armed men” what to do. Will it be the people as a whole (as expressed through their self-managed organisations) or will be it a government (perhaps elected by representative organisations)?

If it was simply a question of consolidating a revolution and its self-defence then there would be no argument:

*“But perhaps the truth is simply this: ... [some] take the expression ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ to mean simply the revolutionary action of the workers in taking possession of the land and the instruments of labour, and trying to build a society and organise a way of life in which there will be no place for a class that exploits and oppresses the producers.*

*“Thus constructed, the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ would be the effective power of all workers trying to bring down capitalist society and would thus turn into Anarchy as soon as resistance from reactionaries would have ceased and no one can any longer seek to compel the masses by violence to obey and work for him. In which case, the discrepancy between us would be nothing more than a question of semantics. Dictatorship of the proletariat would signify the dictatorship of everyone, which is to say, it would be a dictatorship no longer, just as government by everybody is no longer a government in the authoritarian, historical and practical sense of the word.*

*“But the real supporters of ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ do not take that line, as they are making quite plain in Russia. Of course, the proletariat has a hand in this, just as the people has a part to play in democratic regimes, that is to say, to conceal the reality of things. In reality, what we have is the dictatorship of one party, or rather, of one’ party’s leaders: a genuine dictatorship, with its decrees, its penal sanctions, its henchmen and above all its armed forces, which are at present [1919] also deployed in the defence of the revolution against its external enemies, but which will tomorrow be used to impose the dictator’s will upon the workers, to apply a break on revolution, to consolidate the new interests in the process of emerging and protect a new privileged class against the masses.” [Malatesta, **No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, pp. 38–9]*



Maurice Brinton sums up the issue well when he argued that “workers’ power” “cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party — as it repeatedly was by the Bolsheviks ... What ‘taking power’ really implies is that the vast majority of the working class at last realises its ability to manage both production and society — and organises to this end.” [**The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control**, p. xiv]

The question is, therefore, one of **who** “seizes power” — will it be the mass of the population or will it be a party claiming to represent the mass of the population. The difference is vital — and anyone who confuses the issue (like Lenin) does so either out of stupidity or vested interests.

If it is the mass of people then they have to express themselves and their power (i.e. the power to manage their own affairs). That requires that individuals — no matter where they are, be it in the workplace, community or on the front line — are part of self-managed organisations. Only by self-management in functional groups can working class people be said to controlling their own lives and determining their own fate. Such a system of popular assemblies and their means of defence would not be a state in the anarchist sense of the word.

As we argued in section 12, the Trotskyist vision of revolution, while seeming in some ways similar to that of anarchists, differ on this question. For Trotskyists, the **party** takes power, **not** the mass of the population directly. Only if you view “*proletarian*” seizure of power in terms of electing a political party to government could you see the elimination of functional democracy in the armed forces and the workplaces as no threat to working class power. Given Trotsky’s actual elimination of democracy in the Red Army and Navy plus his comments on one-man management (and their justifications — see sections 11 and 17) it is clear that Trotskyists consider the workers’ state in terms of party government, **not** self-management, **not** functional direct democracy.

Yes, the Trotskyists do claim that it is the workers, via their soviets, who will elect the government and hold it accountable but such a position fails to realise that a social revolution can only be created from below, by the direct action of the mass of the population. By delegating power into the hands of a few, the revolution is distorted. The initiative and power no longer rests in the hands of the mass of the population and so they can no longer take part in the constructive work of the revolution **and so it will not reflect their interests and needs**. As power flows from the top-down, bureaucratic distortions are inevitable.

Moreover, the government will inevitably clash with its subjects and Trotskyist theory provides the justification for the government imposing its wishes and negating workers’ democracy (see section 12 for evidence for this claim). Moreover, in the centralised state desired by Trotskyists democratic accountability will inevitably suffer as power flows to the top:

*“The power of the local soviets passed into the hands of the [National] Executive Committee, the power of the Executive Committee passed into the hands of the Council of People’s Commissars, and finally, the power of the Council of People’s Commissars passed into the hands of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party.”* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 152]

Little wonder, then, these CNT aphorisms:

*“power corrupts both those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised; those who think they can conquer the State in order to destroy it are unaware that the State*

*overcomes all its conquerors... dictatorship of the proletariat is dictatorship without the proletariat and against them.”* [Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 456]

That, in a nut shell, why anarchists consider the workers’ state as no real change from the bourgeois state. Rather than creating a system in which working class people directly manage their own affairs, the workers’ state, like any other state, involves the delegation of that power into the hands of a few. Given that state institutions generate specific social relations, specific relations of authority (namely those order giver and order taker) they cannot help becoming separated from society, becoming a new class based on the state’s bureaucratic machine. Any state structure (particularly a highly centralised one, as desired by Leninists) has a certain independence from society and so serves the interests of those within the State institutions rather than the people as a whole.

Perhaps a Leninist will point to **The State and Revolution** as evidence that Lenin desired a state based round the soviets — workers’ council — and so our comments are unjustified. However, as Marx said, judge people by what they do, not what they say. The first act of the October Revolution was to form an executive power **over** the soviets (although, of course, in theory accountable to their national congress). In **The State and Revolution** Lenin praised Marx’s comment that the Paris Commune was both administrative **and** executive. The “workers’ state” created by Lenin did not follow that model (as Russian anarcho-syndicalists argued in August 1918, “*the Soviet of People’s Commissars [i]s an organ which does not stem from the soviet structure but only interferes with its work*” [**The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 118]).

Thus the Bolshevik state was not based around soviet self-management **nor** the fusion of executive and administrative in their hands but rather the use of the soviets to elect a government (a separate executive) which had the real power. The issue is quite simple — either “*All power to the Soviets*” means just that or it means “*All power to the government elected by the Soviets*”. The two are not the same as the first, for the obvious reason that in the second the soviets become simply ratification machines for the government and not organs in which the working masses can run their own affairs. We must also point out that the other promises made in Lenin’s book went the same way as his support for the combining administration and executive tasks in the Paris Commune — and, we stress, all **before** the Civil War started in May 1918 (the usual Trotskyist defence of such betrayals is blame the Civil War which is hard to do as it had not started yet).

So it is unsurprising that Morrow does not explain why anarchists reject the “*dictatorship of the proletariat*” — to do so would be to show that Trotskyism is not the revolutionary movement for workers’ liberty it likes to claim it is. Moreover, it would involve giving an objective account of anarchist theory and admitting that the CNT did not follow its teachings.

## 14. What is wrong with Morrow’s “*fundamental tenet*” of anarchism?

According to Morrow the “*second fundamental tenet in anarchist teaching*” is, apparently, the following:

*“Since Bakunin, the anarchists had accused Marxists of over-estimating the importance of state power, and had characterised this as merely the reflection of the petty-bourgeois*

*intellectuals' pre-occupation with lucrative administrative posts. Anarchism calls upon workers to turn their backs on the state and seek control of the factories as the real source of power. The ultimate sources of power (property relations) being secured, the state power will collapse, never to be replaced."*

He then sums up by stating the Spanish anarchists "*thus failed to understand that it was only the collapse of state power ... which had enabled them to seize the factories.*" [Op. Cit., p. 102]

It would be interesting to discover in what work of Bakunin, or any anarchist, such a position could be found. Morrow gives us no references to help us in our quest — hardly surprising as no anarchist (Spanish or otherwise) ever argued this point before July 1936. However, in September 1936, we discover the CNT arguing that the "*withering away of the State is socialism's ultimate objective. Facts have demonstrated that in practice it is achieved by liquidation of the bourgeois State, brought to a state of asphyxiation by economic expropriation.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 261] This, we must note, was the same month the CNT decided to join the Catalan Government! So much for the state having withered away.

However, will soon be made clear, such comments were a revision of anarchist theory brought about by the apparent victory of the CNT on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1936 (just as other revisions occurred to justify CNT participation in the state). In other words, Morrow's "*second fundamental tenet*" does not exist in anarchist theory. To prove this, we will quote Bakunin and a few other famous anarchists as well as giving an overview of some of the insurrections organised by the CNT before 1936. We start with Bakunin, Kropotkin and Malatesta.

Given that Bakunin thought that it was the "*power of the State*" which "*sustains the privileged classes*" against the "*legitimate indignation of the masses of the people*" it is hard to know what Morrow is talking about. [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 196] Given this perspective, it naturally follows that to abolish capitalism, to allow the seizure of factories by the workers, the state had to be abolished (or "*destroyed*"). Equally clear is that the "*natural and necessary consequence of this destruction will be ... [among others, the] dissolution of army, magistracy, bureaucracy, police and priesthood... confiscation of all productive capital and means of production on behalf of workers' associations, who are to put them to use ... the federative Alliance of all working men's associations ... will constitute the Commune.*" [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings p. 253 and p. 170]

Thus, the state has to be abolished in order to ensure that workers' can take over the means of production, so abolishing capitalism. This is the **direct opposite** of Morrow's claim that "[s]ince Bakunin" anarchism had "*call[ed] upon the workers to turn their backs to the state and seek control of the factories as the real source of power.*" While control of the economy by workers is an important, indeed a key, aspect of a social revolution it is not a sufficient one for anarchists. It must be combined with the destruction of the state (as Bakunin argued, "[n]o revolution could succeed ... today unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 141]). As the power of the state "*sustains*" the capitalists it clearly follows that the capitalist only has his property because the state protects his property claims — without the state, workers' would seize the means of production. Which means, contra Morrow, Bakunin was aware that in order for workers' to take over their workplaces the state had to be destroyed as it was by means of the state that capitalist property rights are enforced.

And, just to stress the obvious, you cannot "*turn your backs on the state*" while dissolving the state bureaucracy, the army, police and so on. This is clear for Bakunin. He argued that "[l]iberty

can only be created by liberty, by an insurrection of all the people and the voluntary organisation of the workers from below upward.” And the nature of this workers’ organisation? Workers’ councils — the “proletariat ... must enter the International [Workers’ Association] en masse, form[ing] factory, artisan, and agrarian sections, and unite them into local federations.” [Statism and Anarchy, p. 179 and p. 49]

Similarly, we discover Kropotkin arguing that “expropriation” would occur at the same time as “the capitalists’ power to resist [had] been smashed” and that “the authorities” will be “overthrown.” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 232 and p. 233] He also recognised the need for self-defence, arguing that the revolution must “withstand both the attempts to form a government that would seek to strangle it and any onslaughts which may emanate from without.” [Op. Cit., p. 232] He argued the Commune “must smash the State and replace it with the Federation and it will act accordingly.” [Op. Cit., p. 259] You cannot do all this by “turning your backs” on the state. To smash the state you need to face it and fight it — there is no other way.

Elsewhere he argued that the commune of the future would base itself on “the principles of anarchist communism” and “entirely abolish ... property, government, and the state.” They will “proclaim and establish their independence by direct socialist revolutionary action, abolishing private property” when “governments are swept away by the people ... the insurgent people will not wait until some new government decrees, in its marvellous wisdom, a few economic reforms.” Rather, they “will take possession on the spot and establish their rights by utilising it without delay. They will organise themselves in the workshops to continue the work, but what they will produce will be what is wanted by the masses, not what gives the highest profit to employers... they will organise themselves to turn to immediate use the wealth stored up in the towns; they will take possession of it as if it had never been stolen from them by the middle class.” [The Commune of Paris] Note that Kropotkin explicitly states that only *after* “governments are swept away” would the “insurgent people ... organise themselves in the workshops.”

As Malatesta noted, the anarchist principles formulated in 1872 at the Congress of St Imier (under the influence of Bakunin, obviously) stated that “[d]estruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat” who must “establish solidarity in revolutionary action outside the framework of bourgeois politics.” He adds, “[n]eedless to say, for the delegates of St. Imier as for us and for all anarchists, the abolition of political power is not possible without the simultaneous destruction of economic privilege.” [Life and Ideas, pp. 157–8]

Malatesta himself always stressed that revolution required “the insurrectionary act which sweeps away the material obstacles, the armed forces of the government.” He argued that “[o]nce the government has been overthrown ... it will be the task of the people ... to provide for the satisfaction of immediate needs and to prepare for the future by destroying privileges and harmful institutions.” [Op. Cit., p. 163 and p. 161] In other words, the revolution needs to smash the state and at the same time abolish capitalism by expropriation by the workers.

Thus anarchism is clear on that you need to destroy the state in order to expropriate capital. Morrow’s assertions on this are clearly false. Rather than urging “workers to turn their backs on the state and seek control of the factories as the real source of power” anarchism calls upon workers to “overthrow,” “smash,” “sweep away,” “destroy,” “dissolve” the state and its bureaucratic machinery via an “insurrectionary act” and expropriate capital **at the same time** — in other words, a popular uprising probably combined with a general strike (“an excellent means for starting the social revolution,” in Malatesta’s words, but not in itself enough to make “armed insurrection unnecessary” [Errico Malatesta, *The Anarchist Reader*, pp. 224–5]).

That, in itself, indicates that Morrow's "*fundamental tenet*" of anarchism does not, in fact, actually exist. In addition, if we look at the history of the CNT during the 1930s we discover that the union organised numerous insurrections which did not, in fact, involve workers "*turning their backs on the state*" but rather attacking the state. For example, in the spontaneous revolt of CNT miners in January 1932, the workers "*seized town halls, raised the black-and-red flags of the CNT, and declared **comunismo libertario***." In Tarassa, the same year, the workers again "*seiz[ed] town halls*" and the town "*swept by street fighting*." The revolt in January 1933 began with "*assaults by Anarchist action groups ... on Barcelona's military barracks ... Serious fighting occurred in working-class **barrios** and the outlying areas of Barcelona ... Uprising occurred in Tarassa, Sardanola-Ripollet, Lerida, in several **pueblos** in Valencia province, and in Andalusia*." In Casas Viejas, as we discussed in section 1, the CNT members surrounded and attacked the barracks of the Civil Guard. In December 1933, the workers "*reared barricades, attacked public buildings, and engaged in heavy street fighting ... many villages declared libertarian communism*." [Murray Bookchin, **The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 225, p. 226, p. 227 and p. 238]

Moreover, "[w]herever possible ... insurrections had carried out industrial and agrarian take-overs and established committees for workers' and peasant's control, libertarian systems of logistics and distribution — in short, a miniature society 'organised on the lines set down by Kropotkin.'" [Bookchin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 239]

Now, does all that really sound like workers turning their backs on the state and only seizing control of their factories?

Perhaps it will be argued that Morrow is referring to **after** the insurrection (although he clearly is not). What about the defence of the revolution? Anarchists have always been clear on this too — the revolution would be defended by the people in arms. We have discussed this issue above (in sections 1 and 8 in particular) so we do not need to discuss it in much detail here. We will just provide another quote by Bakunin (although written in 1865, Bakunin made the same points over and over again until his death in 1876):

*"While it [the revolution] will be carried out locally everywhere, the revolution will of necessity take a federalist format. Immediately after established government has been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines ... In order to defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary for each of them to radiate outwards, to raise all its neighbouring communes in revolt ... and to federate with them for common defence."* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 142]

This was essentially the position agreed by the CNT in May 1936:

*"The armed people will be the best guarantee against all attempts to restore the destroyed regime by interior or exterior forces ... Each Commune should have its arms and elements of defence."* [quoted by Robert Alexander, **The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War**, vol. 1, p. 64]

Like the CNT with its "*Defence Committees*" the defence of the revolution would rest with the commune and its federation. Thus Morrow's "*fundamental tenet*" of anarchism does not exist. We have **never** urged the ignoring of the state nor the idea that seizing economic power will

eliminate political power by itself. Nor is anarchism against the defence of a revolution. The position of the CNT in May 1936 was identical to that of Bakunin in 1865. The question is, of course, how do you organise a revolution and its defence — is it by the whole people or is it by a party representing that people. Anarchists argue for the former, Trotskyists the latter. Needless to say, a state structure (i.e. a centralised, hierarchical structure based on the delegation of power) is required only when a revolution is seen as rule by a party — little wonder anarchists reject the concept of a “workers’ state” as a contradiction in terms.

The question of July 1936 however rears its head. If anarchism **does** stand for insurrection, workers councils and so on, then why did the CNT ignore the state? Surely that suggests anarchism is, as Morrow claims, flawed? No, it does not — as we argue in some detail in section 20 this confuses mistakes by **anarchists** with errors in anarchist theory. The CNT-FAI did not pursue anarchist theory and so July 1936 does not invalidate anarchism. As Bakunin argued, “[n]o revolution could succeed ... unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution.” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 141] The revolution of July 1936 was a social revolution (it expropriated capital and revolutionised social relationships across society) but it was not a political revolution — in other words, it did not destroy the state. The CNT refused to do this because of the danger of fascism and fear of isolation (see section 20). Little wonder the social revolution was defeated — the CNT did not apply basic anarchist theory. To dismiss anarchist ideas because they were not applied seems somewhat strange.

To finish this section we must indicate that Morrow’s statement concerning anarchists “turning our backs” to the state and concentrating on property actually contradicts both Engels and Lenin.

As Lenin notes in **The State and Revolution**, “Marx agreed with Proudhon on the necessity of ‘smashing’ the present state machine... [there is] similarity between Marxism and anarchism (Proudhon and Bakunin) ... on this point” and that anarchists advocate “the destruction of the state machine.” [Essential Works of Lenin, p. 310 and p. 358] You can hardly smash the state or destroy the state machine by “turning your back” to it. Similarly, Engels argued (although distorting his thought somewhat) that Bakunin saw “the **state** as the main evil to be abolished ... [and] maintains that it is the **state** which has created capital, that the capitalist has his capital **only by the grace of the state** ... [Hence] it is above all the state which must be done away with ... organise, and when ALL workers are won over ... abolish the state and replace it with the organisation of the International.” [The Marx-Engels Reader, pp. 728–9] You cannot “abolish” and “replace” the state by ignoring it (“turning your back to it”). We must also stress that Engels comments disprove Lenin’s assertion that anarchists “have absolutely no clear idea of **what** the proletariat will put in its [the states] place.” [Op. Cit., p. 358] We have always been clear, namely a federation of workers’ associations (this was the organisation of the First International). In other, more modern, words, a system of workers’ councils — a position Marxists only embraced six decades later when Lenin advocated them as the basis of his “workers’ state.”

Thus Morrow’s comments against anarchism are in contradiction to usual Marxist claims against anarchism (namely, that we seek to smash the state but do not understand that the workers’ state is necessary to abolish capitalism). Indeed, Engels attributed the opposite idea to Bakunin that Morrow implies anarchists think with regards to property — namely the idea that the capitalist has his property because of the state. Morrow’s “fundamental tenet” of anarchism not only does not exist in anarchist theory, it does not even exist in the Marxist critique of that theory! It is impressive enough to assign a false doctrine to your enemies, it takes real ability to make a claim which contradicts your own theory’s assertions!

## 15. Did Spanish Anarchism aim for the creation of “*collectives*” before the revolution?

The formation of the worker-managed enterprises called “*collectives*” in the Spanish revolution of 1936 has sometimes led people (particularly Marxists) to misconceptions about anarcho-syndicalist and communist-anarchist theory. These comments by a Marxist-Leninist are typical:

*“Spanish anarchists believed that a system of autonomous collectives, with the weakest possible connections between them, was the alternative to capitalism and also to the Marxist view of society running the entire economy as one whole.”*

And:

*“The anarchist theory led to the ordinary anarchist considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there, and not by the working class as a whole.”*  
[Joseph Green, “The Black Autonomy Collective and the Spanish Civil War”, **Communist Voice** no. 10, Vol. 2, no. 5, Oct. 1, 1996]

This assertion is sometimes voiced by Libertarian Marxists of the council communist tendency (who should know better):

*“At the time of the Civil War, a popular idea amongst the Spanish working class and peasants was that each factory, area of land, etc., should be owned collectively by its workers, and that these ‘collectives’ should be linked with each other on a ‘federal’ basis — that is, without any superior central authority.*

*“This basic idea had been propagated by anarchists in Spain for more than 50 years. When the Civil War began, peasants and working class people in those parts of the country which had not immediately fallen under fascist control seized the opportunity to turn anarchist ideal into reality.”* [“Anarchism and the Spanish ‘Revolution’”, **Subversion** no. 18]

Trotskyist Felix Morrow also presents a similar analysis when he states that the POUM “recorded the tendency of CNT unions to treat collectivised property as their own. It never attacked the anarcho-syndicalist theories which created the tendency.” [Op. Cit., p. 104]

However, the truth of the matter is somewhat different.

Firstly, as will soon become clear, CNT policy and anarchist theory was **not** in favour of workers’ owning their individual workplaces. Instead both argued for **socialisation** of the means of life by a system of federations of workers’ assemblies. Individual workplaces would be managed by their workers but they would not exist in isolation or independently of the others — they would be members of various federations (minimally an industrial one and one which united all workplaces regardless of industry in a geographical area). These would facilitate co-ordination and co-operation between self-managed workplaces. The workplace would, indeed, be autonomous but such autonomy did not negate the need for federal organs of co-ordination nor did federation negate that autonomy (as we will discuss later in section 18, autonomy means the ability to make agreements with others and so joining a federation is an expression of autonomy and not necessarily its abandonment, it depends on the nature of the federation).

Secondly, rather than being the product of “*more than 50 years*” of anarchist propaganda or of “*anarcho-syndicalist theories*”, the “*collectives*” instituted during the Civil War were seen by the CNT as merely a temporary stop-gap. They had not been advocated in the CNT’s pre-Civil War program, but came into existence precisely because the CNT was unable to carry out its libertarian communist program, which would have required setting up workers congresses and federal councils to establish co-ordination and aid the planning of common activities between the self-managed workplaces. In other words, the idea of self-managed workplaces was seen as one step in a process of socialisation, the basic building block of a federal structure of workers’ councils. They were **not** seen as an end in themselves no matter how important they were as the base of a socialised economy.

Thus the CNT had never proposed that factories or other facilities would be owned by the people who happened to work there. The CNT’s program called for the construction of “*libertarian communism*.” This was the CNT’s agreed goal, recognising it must be freely created from below. In addition, the Spanish Anarchists argued for “*free experimentation, free show of initiative and suggestions, as well as the freedom of organisation,*” recognising that “[i]n each locality the degree of [libertarian] communism, collectivism or mutualism will depend on conditions prevailing. Why dictate rules? We who make freedom our banner, cannot deny it in economy.” [D. A. de Santillan, **After the Revolution**, p. 97] In other words, the CNT recognised that libertarian communism would not be created overnight and different areas will develop at different speeds and in different directions depending on the material circumstances they faced and what their population desired.

However, libertarian communism was the CNTs declared goal. This meant that the CNT aimed for a situation where the economy as a whole would be socialised and **not** an mutualist economy consisting independent co-operatives owned and controlled by their workers (with the producers operating totally independently of each other on the basis of market exchange). Instead, workers would manage their workplace directly, but would not own it — rather ownership would rest with society as a whole but the day-to-day management of the means of production would be delegated to those who did the actual work. Councils of workers’ delegates, mandated by and accountable to workplace assemblies, would be created to co-ordinate activity at all levels of the economy.

A few quotes will be needed to show that this was, in fact, the position of the Spanish Anarchists. According to Issac Puente, the “*national federations will hold as common property all the roads, railways, buildings, equipment, machinery and workshops.*” The village commune “*will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations.*” [**Libertarian Communism**, p. 29 and p. 26] In D. A. de Santillan’s vision, libertarian communism would see workers’ councils overseeing 18 industrial sectors. There would also be “*councils of the economy*” for local, regional and national levels (ultimately, international as well). [Op. Cit., pp. 50–1 and pp. 80–7] These councils would be “*constitute[d] by delegations or through assemblies*” and “*receives [their] orientation from below and operates in accordance with the resolutions*” of their appropriate “*assemblies.*” [Op. Cit., p. 83 and p. 86]

The CNT’s national conference in Saragossa during May 1936 stressed this vision. Its resolution declared that the revolution would abolish “*private property, the State, the principle of authority, and ... classes.*” It argued that “*the economic plan of organisation, throughout national production, will adjust to the strictest principles of social economy, directly administered by the producers through their various organs of production, designated in general assemblies of the various*



organisations, and always controlled by them.” In urban areas, “the workshop or factory council” would make “pacts with other labour centres” via “Councils of Statistics and Production” which are the “organ of relations of Union to Union (association of producers)”, in other words, workers’ councils. These would “federate among themselves, forming a network of constant and close relations among all the producers of the Iberian Confederation.” In rural areas, “the producers of the Commune” would create a “Council of Cultivation” which would “establish the same network of relations as the Workshop, Factory Councils and those of Production and Statistics, complementing the free federation represented by the Commune.”

The resolution argues that “[b]oth the Associations of industrial producers and Associations of agricultural producers will federate nationally” and “Communes will federate on a county and regional basis ... Together these Communes will constitute an Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes.” Being anarchists, the CNT stressed that “[n]one of these organs will have executive or bureaucratic character” and their members “will carry out their mission as producers, meeting after the work day to discuss questions of details which don’t require the decision of the communal assemblies.” The assemblies themselves “will meet as often as needed by the interests of the Commune... When problems are dealt with which affect a country or province, it must be the Federations which deliberate, and in the meetings and assemblies all Communities will be represented and the delegates will bring points of view previously agreed upon” by the Commune assembly. [quoted by Robert Alexander, *The Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 59, p. 60 and p. 62]

Joan Ferrer, a bookkeeper who was the secretary of the CNT commercial workers union in Barcelona, explained this vision:

*“It was our idea in the CNT that everything should start from the worker, not — as with the Communists — that everything should be run by the state. To this end we wanted to set up industrial federations — textiles, metal-working, department stores, etc. — which would be represented on an overall Economics Council which would direct the economy. Everything, including economic planning, would thus remain in the hands of the workers.”* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, p. 180]

However, social revolution is a dynamic process and things rarely develop exactly as predicted or hoped in pre-revolutionary times. The “collectives” in Spain are an example of this. Although the regional union conferences in Catalonia had put off overthrowing the government in July of 1936, workers began taking over the management of industries as soon as the street-fighting had died down. The initiative for this did not come from the higher bodies — the regional and national committees — but from the rank-and-file activists in the local unions. In some cases this happened because the top management of the enterprise had fled and it was necessary for the workers to take over if production was to continue. But in many cases the local union militants decided to take advantage of the situation to end wage labour by creating self-managed workplaces.

As to be expected of a real movement, mistakes were made by those involved and the development of the movement reflected the real problems the workers faced and their general level of consciousness and what they wanted. This is natural and to denounce such developments in favour of ideal solutions means to misunderstand the dynamic of a revolutionary situation. In the words of Malatesta:

*“To organise a [libertarian] communist society on a large scale it would be necessary to transform all economic life radically, such as methods of production, of exchange and consumption; and all this could not be achieved other than gradually, as the objective circumstances permitted and to the extent that the masses understood what advantages could be gained and were able to act for themselves.” [Life and Ideas, p. 36]*

This was the situation in revolutionary Spain. Moreover, the situation was complicated by the continued existence of the bourgeois state. As Gaston Leval, in his justly famous study of the collectives, states *“it was not ... true socialisation, but ... a self-management straddling capitalism and socialism, which we maintain would not have occurred had the Revolution been able to extend itself fully under the direction of our syndicates.”* [Gaston Leval, **Collectives in the Spanish Revolution**, p. 227–8] Leval in fact terms it *“a form of workers neo-capitalism”* but such a description is inaccurate (and unfortunate) simply because wage labour had been abolished and so it was not a form of capitalism — rather it was a form of mutualism, of workers’ co-operatives exchanging the product of their labour on the market.

However, Leval basic argument was correct — due to the fact the political aspect of the revolution (the abolition of the state) had been “postponed” until after the defeat of fascism, the economic aspects of the revolution would also remain incomplete. The unions that had seized workplaces were confronted with a dilemma. They had control of their individual workplaces, but the original libertarian plan for economic co-ordination was precluded by the continued existence of the State. It was in this context of a partial revolution, under attack by the counter-revolution, that the idea of “collectives” was first put forward to solve some of the problems facing the workers and their self-managed workplaces. Unfortunately, this very “solution” caused problems of its own. For example, Gaston Leval indicates that the collectivisation decree of October 1936 *“legalising collectivisation”, “distorted everything right from the start”* [Op. Cit., p. 227] and did not allow the collectives to develop beyond a mutualist condition into full libertarian communism. It basically legalised the existing situation while hindering its development towards libertarian communism by undermining union control.

This dilemma of self-managed individual workplaces and lack of federations to co-ordinate them was debated at a CNT union plenary in September of 1936. The idea of converting the worker-managed workplaces into co-operatives, operating in a market economy, had never been advocated by the Spanish anarchists before the Civil War, but was now seen by some as a temporary stop-gap that would solve the immediate question of what to do with the workplaces that had been seized by the workers. It was at this meeting that the term *“collective”* was first adopted to describe this solution. This concept of *“collectivisation”* was suggested by Joan Fabregas, a Catalan nationalist of middle class origin who had joined the CNT after July of 1936. As one CNT militant recalled:

*“Up to that moment, I had never heard of collectivisation as a solution for industry — the department stores were being run by the union. What the new system meant was that each collectivised firm would retain its individual character, but with the ultimate objective of federating all enterprises within the same industry.”* [quoted by Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 212]

However, a number of unions went beyond “collectivisation” and took over all the facilities in their industries, eliminating competition between separate firms. The many small barber and

beauty shops in Barcelona were shut down and replaced with large neighbourhood haircutting centres, run through the assemblies of the CNT barbers' union. The CNT bakers union did something similar. The CNT Wood Industry Union shut down the many small cabinet-making shops, where conditions were often dangerous and unhealthy. They were replaced with two large factories, which included new facilities for the benefit of the workforce, such as a large swimming pool.

The union ran the entire industry, from the felling of timber in the Val d'Aran to the furniture showrooms in Barcelona. The railway, maritime shipping and water, gas and electric industry unions also pursued this strategy of industrial unification, as did the textile union in the industrial town of Badalona, outside Barcelona. This was considered to be a step in the direction of eventual socialisation.

At the Catalan union plenary of September, 1936, *"the bigger, more powerful unions, like the woodworkers, the transport workers, the public entertainment union, all of which had already socialised [i.e. unified their industries under union management], wanted to extend their solution to the rest of industry. The smaller, weaker unions wanted to form co-operatives..."* [Fraser, *Op. Cit.*, p. 212]

The collectives came out of this conflict and discussion as a sort of "middle ground" — however, it should be stressed that it did not stop many unions from ignoring the Catalan's governments' attempt to legalise (and so control) the collectives (the so-called "collectivisation" decree) as far as they could. As Albert Perez-Baro, a Catalan Civil Servant noted, *"the CNT ... pursued its own, unilateral objectives which were different. Syndical collectivisation or syndicalised collectives, I would call those objectives; that's to say, collectives run by their respective unions ... The CNT's policy was thus not the same as that pursued by the decree."* [quoted by Fraser, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 212–3] Indeed, Abad de Santillan stated later that he *"was an enemy of the decree because I considered it premature ... When I became [economics] councillor [of the Generalitat for the CNT], I had no intention of taking into account of carrying out the decree; I intended to allow our great people to carry on the task as they saw fit, according to their own aspiration."* [quoted, *Op. Cit.*, p. 212f]

Therefore, when Leninist Joseph Green argues the initial collectivisation of workplaces *"was the masses starting to take things into their own hands, and they showed that they could continue production in their workplaces ... The taking over of the individual workplaces and communities is one step in a revolutionary process. But there is yet more that must be done — the workplaces and communities must be integrated into an overall economy"* he is just showing his ignorance. The CNT, despite Green's assertions to the contrary, were well aware that the initial collectivisations were just one step in the revolution and were acting appropriately. It takes some gall (or extreme ignorance) to claim that CNT theory, policy and actions were, in fact, the exact opposite of what they were. Similarly, when he argues *"[h]ow did the anarchists relate the various workplace collectives to each other in Barcelona? ... they made use of a patchwork system including a Central Labour Bank, an Economic Council, credit ..."* he strangely fails to mention the socialisation attempts made by many CNT industrial unions during the revolution, attempts which reflected pre-war CNT policy. But such facts would get in the way of a political diatribe and so are ignored. [Green, *Op. Cit.*]

Green continues his inaccurate diatribe by arguing that:

*“The problem is that, saddled with their false theory, they could not understand the real nature of the economic steps taken in the collectives, and thus they could not deal with the economic relations that arose among the collectives.” [Op. Cit.]*

However, the only thing false about this is the false assertions concerning anarchist theory. As is crystal clear from our comments above, the Spanish anarchists (like all anarchists) were well aware of the need for economic relations between collectives (self-managed workplaces) before the revolution and acted to create them during it. These were the industrial federations and federations of rural communities/collectives predicted in anarchist and CNT theory and actually created, in part at least, during the revolution itself.

Thus Green’s “critique” of anarchism is, in fact, **exactly** what anarchist theory actually argues and what the Spanish anarchists themselves argued and tried to implement in all industries. Of course, there are fundamental differences between the anarchist vision of socialisation and the Leninist vision of Nationalisation but this does not mean that anarchism is blind to the necessity of integrating workplaces and communities into a coherent system of federations of workers’ councils (as proven above). However, such federation has two sources — it is either imposed from above or agreed to from below. Anarchists choose the former as the latter negates any claim that a revolution is a popular, mass movement from below (and, incidentally, the Leninist claim that the “workers’ state” is simply a tool of the workers to defeat capitalist oppression).

The actual process in Spain towards industrial federations and so socialisation was dependent on the wishes of the workers involved — as would be expected in a true social revolution. For example, the department stores were collectivised and an attempt to federate the stores failed. The works councils opposed it, considering the enterprises as their own and were unwilling to join a federation — the general assemblies of the collectives agreed. Joan Ferrer, the secretary of the CNT commercial union, considered it natural as “[o]nly a few months before, the traditional relationship between employer and worker had been overthrown. Now the workers were being asked to make a new leap — to the concept of collective ownership. It was asking a lot to expect the latter to happen overnight.” [quoted by Fraser, **Op. Cit.**, p. 220]

However, before Leninists like Green rush in and assert that this proves that “anarchist theory led to the ordinary anarchist considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there” we should point out two things. Firstly, it was the “ordinary anarchists” who were trying to organise socialisation (i.e. CNT members and militants). Secondly, the Russian Revolution also saw workers taking over their workplaces and treating them as their own property. Leninists like Green would have a fit if we took these examples to “prove” that Leninism “led to the ordinary Bolshevik worker considering each factory as owned simply by the workers that laboured there” (which was what the Mensheviks **did** argue in 1917 when Martov “blamed the Bolsheviks for creating the local, particularistic attitudes prevailing among the masses.” [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 72]). In other words, such events are a natural part of the process of a revolution and are to be expected regardless of the dominant theory in that revolution.

To summarise.

The Spanish revolution does confirm anarchist theory and in no way contradicts it. While many of the aspects of the collectives were in accord with pre-war CNT policy and anarchist theory, other aspects of them were in contradiction to them. This was seen by the militants of the CNT and FAI who worked to transform these spontaneously created organs of economic self-management into parts of a socialised economy as required for libertarian communism. Such a

transformation flowed from below and was not imposed from above, as would be expected in a libertarian social revolution.

As can be seen, the standard Marxist account of the collectives and its relationship to anarchist theory and CNT policy is simply wrong.

## 16. How does the development of the collectives indicate the differences between Bolshevism and anarchism?

As argued in the last section, the collectives formed during the Spanish Revolution reflected certain aspects of anarchist theory but not others. They were a compromise solution brought upon by the development of the revolution and did not, as such, reflect CNT or anarchist theory or vision bar being self-managed by their workers. The militants of the CNT and FAI tried to convince their members to federate together and truly socialise the economy, with various degrees of success. A similar process occurred during the Russian Revolution of 1917. There workers created factory committees which tried to introduce workers' self-management of production. The differences in outcome in these two experiences and the actions of the Bolsheviks and anarchists indicate well the fundamental differences between the two philosophies. In this section we discuss the contrasting solutions pursued by the CNT and the Bolsheviks in their respective revolutions.

The simple fact is that revolutions are complex and dynamic processes which involve many contradictory developments. The question is how do you push them forward — either from below or from above. Both the Spanish and the Russian revolution were marked by “localism” — when the workers in a factory consider it their own property and ignore wider issues and organisation.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks “solved” the problem of localism by eliminating workers' self-management in favour of one-man management appointed from above. Attempts by the workers and factory committees themselves to combat localism were stopped by the Bolshevik dominated trade unions which “*prevented the convocation of a planned All-Russian Congress of Factory Committees*” in November 1917 when “*called upon*” by the Bolsheviks “*to render a special serve to the nascent Soviet State and to discipline the Factory Committees.*” [I. Deutscher, quoted by Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, p. 19] Instead, the Bolsheviks built from the top-down their system of “*unified administration*” based on converting the Tsarist system of central bodies which governed and regulated certain industries during the war. [Brinton, *Op. Cit.*, p. 36] The CNT, in comparison, tried to solve the problem of localism by a process of discussion and debate from below. Both were aware of the fact the revolution was progressing in ways different from their desired goal but their solution reflected their different politics — libertarian in the case of the CNT, authoritarian in the case of Bolshevism.

Therefore, the actual economic aspects of the Spanish revolution reflected the various degrees of political development in each workplace and industry. Some industries socialised according to the CNT's pre-war vision of libertarian communism, others remained at the level of self-managed workplaces in spite of the theories of the union and anarchists. This was the case with other aspects of the collectives. As Vernon Richards points out, “*[i]n some factories ... the profits or income were shared out among the workers ... As a result, wages fluctuated in different factories and even within the same industry ... But fortunately ... the injustice of this form of collectivisation*”

*was recognised and combated by the CNT syndicates from the beginning.” [Lessons of the Spanish Revolution, pp. 106–7]*

Thus the collectives, rather than expressing the economic vision of communist-anarchism or anarcho-syndicalism, came into existence precisely because the CNT was unable to carry out its libertarian communist program, which would have required setting up workers congresses and co-ordinating councils to establish common ownership and society wide self-management. To assert that the collectives were an exact reflection of anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist theory is, therefore, incorrect. Rather, they reflected certain aspects of that theory (such as workers’ self-management in the workplace) while others (industrial federations to co-ordinate economic activity, for example) were only partially met. This, we must stress, is to be expected as a revolution is a **process** and not an event. As Kropotkin argued:

*“It is a whole insurrectionary period of three, four, perhaps five years that we must traverse to accomplish our revolution in the property system and in social organisation.”*  
[**Words of a Rebel**, p. 72]

Thus the divergence of the actual revolution from the program of the CNT was to be expected and so did not represent a failure or a feature of anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist theory as Morrow and other Marxists assert. Rather, it expresses the nature of a social revolution, a movement from below which, by its very nature, reflects real needs and problems and subject to change via discussion and debate. Bakunin’s comments stress this aspect of the revolution:

*“I do not say that the peasants [and workers], freely organised from the bottom up, will miraculously create an ideal organisation, confirming in all respects to our dreams. But I am convinced that what they construct will be living and vibrant, a thousands times better and more just than any existing organisation. Moreover, this ... organisation, being on the one hand open to revolutionary propaganda ... , and on the other, not petrified by the intervention of the State ... will develop and perfect itself through free experimentation as fully as one can reasonably expect in our times.*

*“With the abolition of the State, the spontaneous self-organisation of popular life ... will revert to the communes. The development of each commune will take its point of departure the actual condition of its civilisation ...”* [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 207]

To **impose** an “ideal” solution would destroy a revolution — the actions and decisions (**including what others may consider mistakes**) of a free people are infinitely more productive and useful than the decisions and decrees of the best central committee. Moreover, a centralised system by necessity is an imposed system (as it excludes by its very nature the participation of the mass of the people in determining their own fate). As Bakunin argued, “Collectivism could be imposed only on slaves, and this kind of collectivism would then be the negation of humanity. In a free community, collectivism can come about only through the pressure of circumstances, not by imposition from above but by a free spontaneous movement from below.” [Op. Cit., p. 200] Thus socialisation must proceed from below, reflecting the real development and desires of those involved. To “*speed-up*” the process via centralisation can only result in replacing socialisation with nationalisation and the elimination of workers’ self-management with hierarchical management. Workers’ again would be reduced to the level of order-takers, with control over their workplaces resting not in their hands but in those of the state.

Lenin argued that “Communism requires and presupposes the greatest possible centralisation of large-scale production throughout the country. The all-Russian centre, therefore, should definitely be given the right of direct control over all the enterprises of the given branch of industry. The regional centres define their functions depending on local conditions of life, etc., in accordance with the general production directions and decisions of the centre.” He continued by explicitly arguing that “[t]o deprive the all-Russia centre of the right to direct control over all the enterprises of the given industry ... would be regional anarcho-syndicalism, and not communism.” [Marx, Engels and Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p. 292]

We expect that Morrow would subscribe to this “solution” to the problems of a social revolution generates. However, such a system has its own problems.

First is the basic fallacy that the centre will not start to view the whole economy as its property (and being centralised, such a body would be difficult to effectively control). Indeed, Stalin’s power was derived from the state bureaucracy which ran the economy in its own interests. Not that it suddenly arose with Stalin. It was a feature of the Soviet system from the start. Samuel Farber, for example, notes that, “in practice, [the] hypercentralisation [pursued by the Bolsheviks from early 1918 onwards] turned into infighting and scrambles for control among competing bureaucracies” and he points to the “not untypical example of a small condensed milk plant with few than 15 workers that became the object of a drawn-out competition among six organisations including the Supreme Council of National Economy, the Council of People’s Commissars of the Northern Region, the Vologda Council of People’s Commissars, and the Petrograd Food Commissariat.” [Op. Cit., p. 73] In other words, centralised bodies are not immune to viewing resources as their own property (and compared to an individual workplace, the state’s power to enforce its viewpoint against the rest of society is considerably stronger).

Secondly, to eliminate the dangers of workers’ self-management generating “propertarian” notions, the workers’ have to have their control over their workplace reduced, if not eliminated. This, by necessity, generates **bourgeois** social relationships and, equally, appointment of managers from above (which the Bolsheviks did embrace). Indeed, by 1920 Lenin was boasting that in 1918 he had “pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the pursue of carrying out the Soviet idea” and even claimed that at that stage “there were no disputes in connection with the question” of one-man management. [quoted by Brinton, Op. Cit., p. 65] While the first claim is true (Lenin argued for one-man management appointed from above **before** the start of the Civil War in May 1918) the latter one is **not** true (excluding anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, there were also the dissent Left-Communists in the Bolshevik party itself).

Thirdly, a centralised body effectively excludes the mass participation of the mass of workers — power rests in the hands of a few people which, by its nature, generates bureaucratic rule. This can be seen from the example of Lenin’s Russia. The central bodies the Bolsheviks created had little knowledge of the local situation and often gave orders that contradicted each other or had little bearing to reality, so encouraging factories to ignore the centre. In other words the government’s attempts to centralise actually led to localism (as well as economic mismanagement)! Perhaps this was what Green means when he argues for a “new centralism” which would be “compatible with and requiring the initiative of the workers at the base” [Green Op. Cit.] — that is, the initiative of the workers to ignore the central bodies and keep the economy going **in spite** of the “new centralism”?

The simple fact is, a socialist society **must** be created from below, by the working class itself. If the workers do not know how to create the necessary conditions for a socialist organisation

of labour, no one else can do it for them or compel them to do it. If the state is used to combat “localism” and such things then it obviously cannot be in the hands of the workers’ themselves. Socialism can only be created by workers’ own actions and organisations otherwise it will not be set up at all — something else will be, namely state capitalism.

Thus, a close look at Lenin’s “*solution*” indicates that Trotskyist claim that their state is the “*tool of the majority in their fight against exploitation by the few*” (to use Joseph Green’s words) is refuted by their assertion that this state will also bring the economy under centralised control and by the actions of the Bolsheviks themselves.

Why is this? Simply because if the mass of collectives are not interested in equality and mutual aid in society as a whole then how can the government actually be the “*tool*” of the majority when it imposes such “*mutual aid*” and “*equality*” upon the collectives? In other words, the interests of the government replace those of the majority. After all, if workers **did** favour mutual aid and equality then they would federate themselves to achieve it. (which the collectives were actually doing all across Spain, we must note). If they do not do this then how can the “*workers’ state*” be said to be simply their tool when it has to **impose** the appropriate economic structure upon them? The government is elected by the whole people, so it will be claimed, and so must be their tool. This is obviously flawed — “*if,*” argued Malatesta, “*you consider these worthy electors as unable to look after their own interests themselves, how is it that they will know how to choose for themselves the shepherds who must guide them? And how will they be able to solve this problem of social alchemy, of producing a genius from the votes of a mass of fools? And what will happen to the minorities which are still the most intelligent, most active and radical part of a society?*” [Malatesta, *Anarchy*, p. 53]

What does all this mean? Simply that Trotskyists recognise, implicitly at least, that the workers’ state is not, in fact, the simple tool of the workers. Rather, it is the means by which “*socialism*” will be imposed upon the workers by the party. If workers do not practice mutual aid and federation in their day-to-day running of their lives, then how can the state impose it if it is simply their tool? It suggests what is desired “*by all of the working people as a whole*” (nearly always a euphemism for the party in Trotskyist ideology) is different that what they actually want (as expressed by their actions). In other words, a conflict exists between the workers’ and the so-called “*workers’ state*” — in Russia, the party imposed **its** concept of the interests of the working class, even against the working class itself.

Rather than indicate some kind of failure of anarchist theory, the experience of workers’ self-management in both Spain and Russia indicate the authoritarian core of Trotskyist ideology. If workers do not practice mutual aid or federation then a state claiming to represent them, to be simply their tool, cannot force them to do so without exposing itself as being an alien body with power **over** the workers.

For these reasons Bakunin was correct to argue that anarchists have “*no faith except in freedom. Both [Marxists and anarchists], equally supporters of science which is to destroy superstition and replace belief, differ in the former wishing to impose it, and the latter striving to propagate it; so human groups, convinced of its truth, may organise and federate spontaneously, freely, from the bottom up, by their own momentum according to their real interests, but never according to any plan laid down in advance and imposed upon the **ignorant masses** by some superior intellects.*” Anarchists, he continues, “*think that there is much more practical and intellectual common sense in the instinctive aspirations and in the real needs of the mass of the people than in the profound intelligence of all these doctors and teachers of mankind who, after so many fruitless attempts to*



*make humanity happy, still aspire to add their own efforts.*” [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 198]

In summary, the problem of “localism” and any other problems faced by a social revolution will be solved in the interests of the working class only if working class people solve them themselves. For this to happen it requires working class people to manage their own affairs directly and that implies self-managed organising from the bottom up (i.e. anarchism) rather than delegating power to a minority at the top, to a “revolutionary” party or government. This applies economically, socially and politically. As Bakunin argued, the “*revolution should not only be made for the people’s sake; it should also be made by the people.*” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 141]

Thus the actual experience of the collectives and their development, rather than refuting anarchism, indicates well that it is the only real form of socialism. Attempts to nationalise the means of production inevitably disempower workers and eliminate meaningful workers’ self-management or control. It does not eliminate wage labour but rather changes the name of the boss. Socialism can only be built from below. If it is not, as the Russian experience indicated, then state capitalism will be the inevitable outcome.

## 17. Why is Morrow’s support for “*proletarian methods of production*” ironic?

Morrow states “[i]n the midst of civil war the factory committees are demonstrating the superiority of proletarian methods of production.” [Op. Cit., p. 53] This is ironic as the Bolsheviks in power fought against the factory committees and their attempts to introduce the kind of workers’ self-management Morrow praises in Spain (see Maurice Brinton’s **The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control** for details). Moreover, rather than seeing workers’ self-management as “*proletarian methods of production*” Lenin and Trotsky thought that how a workplace was managed was irrelevant under socialism. Trotsky argued that “[i]t would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy of the collective will of the workers [a euphemism for the Party — M.B.] and not at all in the form in which individual economic organisations are administered.” Indeed, “I consider if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic administration much sooner and much less painfully.” [quoted by Maurice Brinton, Op. Cit., p. 66 and pp. 66–7]

In other words, Trotsky both in theory and in practice opposed “*proletarian methods of production*” — and if the regime introduced by Trotsky and Lenin in Russia was **not** based on “*proletarian methods of production*” then what methods was it based on? One-man management with “*the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers*” by the government and “*the people unquestioningly obey[ing] the single will of the leaders of labour.*” [The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government, p. 32 and p. 34] In other words, the usual **bourgeois** methods of production with the workers’ doing what the boss tells them. At no time did the Bolsheviks support the kind of workers’ self-management introduced by the anarchist influenced workers of Spain — indeed they hindered it and replaced it with one-man management at the first opportunity (see Maurice Brinton’s classic **The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control** for details).

To point out the obvious, bourgeois methods of production means bourgeois social relations and relations of production. In other words, Morrow comments allows us to see that Lenin and Trotsky's regime was not proletarian at the point of production. How ironic. And if it was not proletarian at the point of production (i.e. at the source of **economic** power) how could it remain proletarian at the political level? Unsurprisingly, it did not — party power soon replaced workers' power and the state bureaucracy replaced the party.

Yet again Morrow's book exposes the anti-revolutionary politics of Trotskyism by allowing anarchists to show the divergence between the rhetoric of that movement and what it did when it was in power. Morrow, faced with a workers' movement influenced by anarchism, inadvertently indicates the poverty of Trotskyism when he praises the accomplishments of that movement. The reality of Leninism in power was that it eliminated the very things Morrow praises — such as "*proletarian methods of production*," democratic militias, workers' councils and so on. Needless to say, the irony of Morrow's work is lost on most of the Trotskyists who read it.

## 18. Were the federations of collectives an "*abandonment*" of anarchist ideas?

From our discussion in section 15, it is clear that anarchism does not deny the need for co-ordination and joint activity, for federations of self-managed workplaces, industries and rural collectives at all levels of society. Far from it. As proven in sections 12 and 15, such federations are a basic idea of anarchism. In anarchy co-ordination flows **from below** and not imposed by a few from above. Unfortunately Marxists cannot tell the difference between solidarity from below and unity imposed from above. Morrow, for example, argues that "*the anarchist majority in the Council of Aragon led in practice to the abandonment of the anarchist theory of the autonomy of economic administration. The Council acted as a centralising agency.*" [Op. Cit., pp. 205–6]

Of course it does nothing of the kind. Yes, anarchists are in favour of autonomy — including the autonomy of economic administration. We are also in favour of federalism to co-ordinate joint activity and promote co-operation on a wide-scale (what Morrow would, inaccuracy, call "*centralism*" or "*centralisation*"). Rather than seeing such agreements of joint activity as the "*abandonment*" of autonomy, we see it as an **expression** of that autonomy. It would be a strange form of "*freedom*" that suggested making arrangements and agreements with others meant a restriction of your liberty. For example, no one would argue that to arrange to meet your friend at a certain place and time meant the elimination of your autonomy even though it obviously reduces your "*liberty*" to be somewhere else at the same time.

Similarly, when an individual joins a group and takes part in its collective decisions and abides by their decisions, this does not represent the abandonment of their autonomy. Rather, it is an expression of their freedom. If we took Morrow's comment seriously then anarchists would be against all forms of organisation and association as they would mean the "*abandonment of autonomy*" (of course some Marxists **do** make that claim, but such a position indicates an essentially **negative** viewpoint of liberty, a position they normally reject). In reality, of course, anarchists are aware that freedom is impossible outside of association. Within an association absolute "*autonomy*" cannot exist, but such "*autonomy*" would restrict freedom to such a degree that it would be so self-defeating as to make a mockery of the concept of autonomy and no sane person would seek it.

Of course anarchists are aware that even the best association could turn into a bureaucracy that **does** restrict freedom. Any organisation could transform from being an expression of liberty into a bureaucratic structure which restricts liberty because power concentrates at the top, into the hands of an elite. That is why we propose specific forms of organisation, ones based on self-management, decentralisation and federalism which promote decision-making from the bottom-up and ensure that the organisation remains in the hands of its members and its policies are agreements between them rather than ones imposed upon them. For this reason the basic building block of the federation is the autonomous group assembly. It is this body which decides on its own issues and mandates delegates to reach agreements within the federal structure, leaving to itself the power to countermand the agreements its delegates make. In this way autonomy is combined with co-ordination in an organisation that is structured to accurately reflect the needs and interests of its members by leaving power in their hands. In the words of Murray Bookchin, anarchists “do not deny the need for co-ordination between groups, for discipline, for meticulous planning, and for unity in action. But [we] believe that co-ordination, discipline, planning, and unity in action must be achieved **voluntarily**, by means of self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding, not by coercion and a mindless, unquestioning obedience to orders from above.” [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 215]

Therefore, anarchist support for “the autonomy of economic administration” does not imply the lack of co-operation and co-ordination, of joint agreements and federal structures which may, to the uninformed like Morrow, seem to imply the “abandonment” of autonomy. As Kropotkin argued, the commune “cannot any longer acknowledge any superior: that, above it, there cannot be anything, save the interests of the Federation, freely embraced by itself in concert with other Communes.” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 259] This vision was stressed in the CNT’s Saragossa resolution on Libertarian Communism made in May, 1936, which stated that the “the foundation of this administration will be the commune. These communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels to achieve their general goals. The right to autonomy does not preclude the duty to implement agreements regarding collective benefits.” [quoted by Jose Peirats, The CNT in the Spanish Revolution, p. 106] Hence anarchists do not see making collective decisions and working in a federation as an abandonment of autonomy or a violation of anarchist theory.

The reason for this is simple. To exercise your autonomy by joining self-managing organisations and, therefore, agreeing to abide by the decisions you help make is not a denial of that autonomy (unlike joining a hierarchical structure, we must stress). That is why anarchists have always stressed the importance of the **nature** of the associations people join as **well as** their voluntary nature — as Kropotkin argued, the “communes of the next revolution will not only break down the state and substitute free federation for parliamentary rule; they will part with parliamentary rule within the commune itself ... They will be anarchist within the commune as they will be anarchist outside it.” [The Commune of Paris] Moreover, within the federal structures anarchists envision, the actual day-to-day running of the association would be autonomous. There would be little or no need for the federation to interfere with the mundane decisions a group has to make day in, day out. As the Saragossa resolution makes clear:

*“[The] commune ... will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms may be agreed by majority vote after free debate ... The inhabitants of a commune are to debate among themselves their internal problems ... Federations are to deliberate over major problems*

*affecting a country or province and all communes are to be represented at their reunions and assemblies, thereby enabling their delegates to convey the democratic viewpoint of their respective communes ... every commune which is implicated will have its right to have its say ... On matters of a regional nature, it is the duty of the regional federation to implement agreements ... So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the commune, to the federation and right on up finally to the confederation.”* [quoted by Jose Peirats, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 106–7]

Since the Council of Aragon and the Federation of Collectives were based on a federal structure, regular meetings of mandated delegates and decision-making from the bottom up, it would be wrong to call them a “centralising agency” or an “abandonment” of the principle of “autonomy.” Rather, they were expressions of that autonomy based around a **federal** and not centralised organisation. The autonomy of the collective, of its mass assembly, was not restricted by the federation nor did the federation interfere with the day to day running of the collectives which made it up. The structure was a federation of autonomous collectives. The role of the Council was to co-ordinate the decisions of the federation delegate meetings — in other words, purely administrative implementation of collective agreements. To confuse this with centralisation is a mistake common to Marxists, but it is still a confusion.

To summarise, what Morrow claims is an “abandonment” of anarchism is, in fact, an expression of anarchist ideas. The Council of Aragon and the Aragon Federation of Collectives were following the CNT’s vision of libertarian communism and not abandoning it, as Morrow claims. As anyone with even a basic understanding of anarchism would know.

## 19. Did the experience of the rural collectives refute anarchism?

Some Leninists attack the rural collectives on similar lines as they attack the urban ones (as being independent identities and without co-ordination — see section 15 for details). They argue that “anarchist theory” resulted in them considering themselves as being independent bodies and so they ignored wider social issues and organisation. This meant that anarchist goals could not be achieved:

*“Let’s evaluate the Spanish collectives according to one of the basic goals set by the anarchists themselves. This was to ensure equality among the toilers. They believed that the autonomous collectives would rapidly equalise conditions among themselves through ‘mutual aid’ and solidarity. This did not happen ... conditions varied greatly among the Spanish collectives, with peasants at some agricultural collectives making three times that of peasants at other collectives.”* [Joseph Green, *Op. Cit.*]

Of course, Green fails to mention that in the presumably “centralised” system created by the Bolsheviks, the official rationing system had a differentiation of **eight to one** under the class ration of May 1918. By 1921, this, apparently, had fallen to around four to one (which is still higher than the rural collectives) but, in fact, remained at eight to one due to workers in selected defence-industry factories getting the naval ration which was approximately double that of the top civilian workers’ ration. [Mary McAuley, *Bread and Justice: State and Society in Petrograd 1917–1922*, pp. 292–3] This, we note, ignores the various privileges associated with state office

and Communist Party membership which would increase differentials even more (and such inequality extended into other fields, Lenin for example warned in 1921 against “giving non-Party workers a false sense of having some increase in their rights” [Marx, Engels and Lenin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 325]). The various resolutions made by workers for equality in rations were ignored by the government (all this long before, to use Green’s words “*their party degenerated into Stalinist revisionism*”).

So, if equality is important, then the decentralised rural collectives were far more successful in achieving it than the “centralised” system under Lenin (as to be expected, as the rank-and-file were in control, not a few at the top).

Needless to the collectives could not unify history instantly. Some towns and workplaces started off on a more favourable position than others. Green quotes an academic (David Miller) on this:

*“Such variations no doubt reflected historical inequalities of wealth, but at the same time the redistributive impact of the [anarchist] federation had clearly been slight.”*

Note that Green implicitly acknowledges that the collectives **did** form a federation. This makes a mockery of his claims that earlier claims that the anarchists “*believed that the village communities would enter the realm of a future liberated society if only they became autonomous collectives. They didn’t see the collectives as only one step, and they didn’t see the need for the collectives to be integrated into a broader social control of all production.*” [Op. Cit.] As proven above, such assertions are either the product of ignorance or a conscious lie. We quoted numerous Spanish anarchist documents that stated the exact opposite to Green’s assertions. The Spanish anarchists were well aware of the need for self-managed communities to federate. Indeed, the federation of collectives fits **exactly** pre-war CNT policy and anarchist theory (see sections 15 and 18 for details). To re-quote a Spanish Anarchist pamphlet, the village commune “*will federate with its counterparts in other localities and with the national industrial federations.*” [Issac Puente, *Libertarian Communism*, p. 26] Thus what Green asserts the CNT and FAI did not see the need of, they in fact **did** see the need for and argued for their creation before the Civil War and actually created during it! Green’s comments indicate a certain amount of “doublethink” — he maintains that the anarchists rejected federations while acknowledging they did federate.

However, historical differences are the product of **centuries** and so it will take some time to overcome them, particularly when such changes are not imposed by a central government. In addition, the collectives were not allowed to operate freely and were soon being hindered (if not physically attacked) by the state within a year. Green dismisses this recognition of reality by arguing “*one could argue that the collectives didn’t have much time to develop, being in existence for only two and a half years at most, with the anarchists only having one year of reasonably unhindered work, but one could certainly not argue that this experience confirmed anarchist theory.*” However, his argument is deeply flawed for many reasons.

Firstly, we have to point out that Green quotes Miller who is using data from collectives in Castille. Green, however, was apparently discussing the collectives of Aragon and the Levante and their respective federations (as was Miller). To state the obvious, it is hard to evaluate the activities of the Aragon or Levante federation using data from collectives in the Castille federation. Moreover, in order to evaluate the redistributive activities of the federations you need to look at the differentials before and after the federation was created. The data Miller uses does not do

that and so the lack of success of the federation cannot be evaluated using Green's source. Thus Green uses data which is, frankly, a joke to dismiss anarchism. This says a lot about the quality of his critique.

As far as the Castille federation goes, Robert Alexander notes "[a]nother feature of the work of regional federation was that of aiding the less fortunate collectives. Thus, within a year, it spent 2 000 000 pesetas on providing chemical fertilisers and machines to poorer collectives, the money from this being provided by the sale of products of the wealthier ones." [The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War, vol. 1, p. 438] He also quotes an article from an anarchist paper which states "there does not yet exist sufficient solidarity" between rich and poor collectives and that notes "the difficulties which the State has put in the way of the development of the collectives." [Op. Cit., p. 439] Thus the CNT was open about the difficulties it was experiencing in the collectives and the problems facing it.

Secondly, the collectives may have been in existence for about one year before the Stalinists attacked but their federations had not. The Castille federation was born in April, 1937 (the general secretary stated in July of that year "[w]e have fought terrible battles with the Communists" [Op. Cit., p. 446]). The Aragon federation was created in February 1937 (the Council of Aragon was created in October 1936) and the Communists under Lister attacked in August 1937. The Levante federation was formed a few weeks after the start of the war and the attacks against them started in March 1937. The longest period of free development, therefore, was only **seven** months and not a year. Thus the federations of collectives — the means seen by anarchist theory to co-ordinate economic and social activities and promote equality — existed for only a few months before they were physically attacked by the state. Green expects miracles if he thinks history can be nullified in half a year.

Thirdly, anarchists do not think communist-anarchism, in all its many aspects, is possible overnight. Anarchists are well aware, to quote Kropotkin, the "revolution may assume a variety of characters and differing degrees of intensity among different peoples." [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 231] Also, as noted above, we are well aware that a revolution is a **process** ("By revolution we do not mean just the insurrectionary act" [Malatesta, **Life and Ideas**, p. 156]) which will take some time to fully develop once the state has been destroyed and capital expropriated. Green's assertion that the Spanish Revolution refutes anarchist theory is clearly a false one.

Green argues that a "vast organisational task faces the oppressed masses who are rising up to eliminate the old exploiting system, but anarchist theory just brushes aside this problem — co-ordination between collective would supposedly be easily accomplished by 'mutual aid' or 'voluntary co-operation' or, if absolutely need be, by the weakest possible federation." [Op. Cit.] As can be seen from our discussion, such a claim is a false one. Anarchists are well aware of difficulties involved in a revolution. That is why we stress that revolution must come from below, by the actions of the oppressed themselves — it is far too complex to left to a few party leaders to decree the abolition of capitalism. Moreover, as proven above anarchist theory and practice is well aware of the need for organisation, co-operation and co-ordination. We obviously do not "brush it aside." This can be seen from Green's reference to "the weakest possible federation." This obviously is a cover just in case the reader is familiar with anarchist theory and history and knows that anarchists support the federation of workers' associations and communes as the organisational framework of a revolution and of the free society.

This distorted vision of anarchism even extends to other aspects of the revolution. Green decides to attack the relative lack of international links the Spanish anarchist movement had in

1936. He blames this on anarchist theory and states “again the localist anarchist outlook would go against such preparations. True, the anarchists had had their own International association in the 1870s, separate from the original First International and the Marxists. It had flopped so badly that the anarchists never tried to resuscitate it and seem to prefer to forget about it. Given anarchist localism, it is not surprising that this International doesn’t even seem to be been missed by current-day anarchists.” [Op. Cit.]

Actually, the anarchist International came out of the First International and was made up of the libertarian wing of that association. Moreover, in 1936 the CNT was a member of the International Workers’ Association founded in 1922 in Berlin. The IWA was small, but this was due to state and Fascist repression. For example, the German FAUD, the Italian USI and the FORA in Argentina had all been destroyed by fascist governments. However, those sections which did exist (such as the Swedish SAC and French CGTSR) **did** send aid to Spain and spread CNT and FAI news and appeals (as did anarchist groups across the world). The IWA still exists today, with sections in over a dozen countries (including the CNT in Spain). In addition, the International Anarchist Federation also exists, having done so for a number of decades, and also has sections in numerous countries. In other words, Green either knows nothing about anarchist history and theory or he does and is lying.

He attacks the lack of CNT support for Moroccan independence during the war and states “[t]hey just didn’t seem that concerned with the issue during the Civil War.” Actually, many anarchists **did** raise this important issue. Just one example, Camillo Berneri argued that “we must intensify our propaganda in favour of Morocco autonomy.” [“What can we do?”, **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 51] Thus to state “the anarchists ... didn’t seem that concerned” is simply false. Many anarchists were and publicly argued for it. Trapped as a minority force in the government, the CNT could not push through this position.

Green also points out that inequality existed between men and woman. He even quotes the anarchist women’s organisation Mujeres Libres to prove his point. He then notes what the Bolsheviks did to combat sexism, “[a]mong the methods of influence was mobilising the local population around social measures promulgated throughout the country. The banner of the struggle was not autonomy, but class-wide effort.” Two points, Mujeres Libres was a nation wide organisation which aimed to end sexism by collective action inside and outside the anarchist movement by organising women to achieve their own liberation (see Martha Ackelsberg’s , **Free Women of Spain** for more details). Thus its aims and mode of struggle was “class-wide” — as anyone familiar with that organisation and its activities would know. Secondly, why is equality between men and women important? Because inequality reduces the freedom of women to control their own lives, in a word, it hinders they **autonomy**. Any campaign against sexism is based on the banner of autonomy — that Green decides to forget this suggests a lot about his politics.

Thus Green gets it wrong again and again. Such is the quality of most Leninist accounts of the Spanish revolution.

## 20. Does the experience of the Spanish Revolution indicate the failure of anarchism or the failure of anarchists?

Marxists usually point to the events in Catalonia after July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1936, as evidence that anarchism is a flawed theory. They bemoan the fact that, when given the chance, the anarchists did not “seize power” and create a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” To re-quote Trotsky:

*“A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.” [Stalinism and Bolshevism]*

However, as we argued in section 12, the Trotskyist “definition” of “workers’ power” and “proletarian dictatorship” is, in fact, party power, party dictatorship and party sovereignty — **not** working class self-management. Indeed, in a letter written in 1937, Trotsky clarified what he meant: *“Because the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship **for themselves** they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship.”* [our emphasis, **Writings 1936–7**, p. 514]

Hence the usual Trotskyist lament concerning the CNT is that the anarchist leaders did not seize power themselves and create the so-called “dictatorship of the proletariat” (i.e. the dictatorship of those claiming to represent the proletariat). A strange definition of “workers’ power,” we must admit. The “leaders” of the CNT and FAI quite rightly rejected such a position — unfortunately they also rejected the anarchist position at the same time, as we will see.

Trotsky states that the *“leaders of the CNT ... explained their open betrayal of the theory of anarchism by the pressure of ‘exceptional circumstances’ ... Naturally, civil war is not a peaceful and ordinary but an ‘exceptional circumstance.’ Every serious revolutionary organisation, however, prepares precisely for ‘exceptional circumstances.’”* [“Stalinism and Bolshevism”, **Op. Cit.**, p. 16]

Trotsky is, for once, correct. We will ignore the obvious fact that his own (and every other Leninist) account of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into Stalinism is a variation of the “exceptional circumstances” excuse and turn to his essential point. In order to evaluate anarchism and the actions of the CNT we have to evaluate **all** the revolutionary situations it found itself in, **not** just July, 1936 in Catalonia. This is something Trotsky and his followers seldom do — for reasons that will become clear.

Obviously space considerations does not allow us to discuss every revolutionary situation anarchism faced. We will, therefore, concentrate on the Russian Revolution and the activities of the CNT in Spain in the 1930s. These examples will indicate that rather than signifying the failure of anarchism, the actions of the CNT during the Civil War indicate the failure of anarchists to apply anarchist theory and so signifies a betrayal of anarchism. In other words, that anarchism is a valid form of revolutionary politics.

If we look at the Russian Revolution, we see anarchist theory gain its most wide scale influence in those parts of the Ukraine protected by the Makhnovist army. The Makhnovists fought against White (pro-Tsarist), Red and Ukrainian Nationalists in favour of a system of “free soviets” in which the *“working people themselves must freely choose their own soviets, which are to carry out the will and desires of the working people themselves. that is to say, **administrative**, not ruling councils.”* As for the economy, the *“land, the factories, the workshops, the mines, the railroads and the other wealth of the people must belong to the working people themselves, to those who work in them, that*



is to say, they must be socialised.” [“Some Makhnovist Proclamations”, contained in Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, p. 273]

To ensure this end, the Makhnovists refused to set up governments in the towns and cities they liberated, instead urging the creation of free soviets so that the working people could govern themselves. Taking the example of Aleksandrovsk, once they had liberated the city the Makhnovists “immediately invited the working population to participate in a general conference ... it was proposed that the workers organise the life of the city and the functioning of the factories with their own forces and their own organisations ... The first conference was followed by a second. The problems of organising life according to principles of self-management by workers were examined and discussed with animation by the masses of workers, who all welcomed this ideas with the greatest enthusiasm ... Railroad workers took the first step ... They formed a committee charged with organising the railway network of the region ... From this point, the proletariat of Aleksandrovsk began systematically to the problem of creating organs of self-management.” [Op. Cit., p. 149]

They also organised free agricultural communes which “[a]dmittedly ... were not numerous, and included only a minority of the population ... But what was most precious was that these communes were formed by the poor peasants themselves. The Makhnovists never exerted any pressure on the peasants, confining themselves to propagating the idea of free communes.” [Op. Cit., p. 87] Makhno played an important role in abolishing the holdings of the landed gentry. The local soviet and their district and regional congresses equalised the use of the land between all sections of the peasant community. [Op. Cit., pp. 53–4]

Moreover, the Makhnovists took the time and energy to involve the whole population in discussing the development of the revolution, the activities of the army and social policy. They organised numerous conferences of workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ delegates to discuss political and social issues. They organised a regional congress of peasants and workers when they had liberated Aleksandrovsk. When the Makhnovists tried to convene the third regional congress of peasants, workers and insurgents in April 1919 and an extraordinary congress of several regions in June 1919 (including Red Army soldiers) the Bolsheviks viewed them as counter-revolutionary, tried to ban them and declared their organisers and delegates outside the law. For example, Trotsky issued order 1824 which stated the June 1919 congress was forbidden, that to inform the population of it was an act of high treason and all delegates should be arrested immediately as were all the spreading the call. [Op. Cit., p. 98–105 and p. 122–31]

The Makhnovists replied by holding the conferences anyway and asking “[c]an there exist laws made by a few people who call themselves revolutionaries, which permit them to outlaw a whole people who are more revolutionary than they are themselves?” and “[w]hose interests should the revolution defend: those of the Party or those of the people who set the revolution in motion with their blood?” Makhno himself stated that he “consider[ed] it an inviolable right of the workers and peasants, a right won by the revolution, to call conferences on their own account, to discuss their affairs.” [Op. Cit., p. 103 and p. 129] These actions by the Bolsheviks should make the reader ponder if the elimination of workers’ democracy during the civil war can fully be explained by the objective conditions facing Lenin’s government or whether Leninist ideology played an important role in it. As Arshinov argues, “[w]hoever studies the Russian Revolution should learn it [Trotsky’s order no. 1824] by heart.” [Op. Cit., p. 123] Obviously the Bolsheviks considered that soviet system was threatened if soviet conferences were called and the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was undermined if the proletariat took part in such events.

In addition, the Makhnovists “full applied the revolutionary principles of freedom of speech, of thought, of the press, and of political association. In all cities and towns occupied by the Makhnovists, they began by lifting all the prohibitions and repealing all the restrictions imposed on the press and on political organisations by one or another power.” Indeed, the “only restriction that the Makhnovists considered necessary to impose on the Bolsheviks, the left Socialist-Revolutionaries and other statists was a prohibition on the formation of those ‘revolutionary committees’ which sought to impose a dictatorship over the people.” [Op. Cit., p. 153 and p. 154]

The army itself, in stark contrast to the Red Army, was fundamentally democratic (although, of course, the horrific nature of the civil war did result in a few deviations from the ideal — however, compared to the regime imposed on the Red Army by Trotsky, the Makhnovists were much more democratic movement). Arshinov proves a good summary:

*“The Makhnovist insurrectionary army was organised according to three fundamental principles: voluntary enlistment, the electoral principle, and self-discipline.*

*“Voluntary enlistment meant that the army was composed only of revolutionary fighters who entered it of their own free will.*

*“The electoral principle meant that the commanders of all units of the army, including the staff, as well as all the men who held other positions in the army, were either elected or accepted by the insurgents of the unit in question or by the whole army.*

*“Self-discipline meant that all the rules of discipline were drawn up by commissions of insurgents, then approved by general assemblies of the various units; once approved, they were rigorously observed on the individual responsibility of each insurgent and each commander.” [Op. Cit., p. 96]*

Thus the Makhnovists indicate the validity of anarchist theory. They organised the self-defence of their region, refused to form of a “revolutionary” government and so the life of the region, its social and revolutionary development followed the path of self-activity of the working people who did not allow any authorities to tell them what to do. They respected freedom of association, speech, press and so on while actively encouraging workers’ and peasants’ self-management and self-organisation.

Moving to the Spanish movement, the various revolts and uprisings organised by the CNT and FAI that occurred before 1936 were marked by a similar revolutionary developments as the Makhnovists. We discuss the actual events of the revolts in 1932 and 1933 in more detail in section 14 and so will not repeat ourselves here. However, all were marked by the anarchist movement attacking town halls, army barracks and other sources of state authority and urging the troops to revolt and side with the masses (the anarchists paid a lot of attention to this issue — like the French syndicalists they produced anti-militarist propaganda arguing that soldiers should side with their class and refuse orders to fire on strikers and to join popular revolts). The revolts also saw workers taking over their workplaces and the land, trying to abolish capitalism while trying to abolish the state. In summary, they were **insurrections** which combined political goals (the abolition of the state) and social ones (expropriation of capital and the creation of self-managed workplaces and communes).

The events in Asturias in October 1934 gives a more detailed account of nature of these insurrections. The anarchist role in this revolt has not been as widely known as it should be and this is

an ideal opportunity to discuss it. Combined with the other insurrections of the 1930s it clearly indicates that anarchism is a valid form of revolutionary theory.

While the CNT was the minority union in Asturias, it had a considerable influence of its own (the CNT had over 22 000 affiliates in the area and the UGT had 40 000). The CNT had some miners in their union (the majority were in the UGT) but most of their membership was above ground, particularly in the towns of Aviles and Gijon. The regional federation of the CNT had joined the Socialist Party dominated “*Alianza Obrera*,” unlike the other regional federations of the CNT.

When the revolt started, the workers organised attacks on barracks, town halls and other sources of state authority (just as the CNT revolts of 1932 and 1933 had). Bookchin indicates that “[s]tructurely, the insurrection was managed by hundreds of small revolutionary committees whose delegates were drawn from unions, parties, the FAI and even anti-Stalinist Communist groups. Rarely, if at all, were there large councils (or ‘soviets’) composed of delegates from factories.” [The Spanish Anarchists, p. 249] This, incidentally, indicates that Morrow’s claims that in Asturias “the Workers’ Alliances were most nearly like soviets, and had been functioning for a year under socialist and Communist Left leadership” are false. [Op. Cit., p. 31] The claims that the Asturias uprising had established soviets was simply Communist and government propaganda.

In fact, the Socialists “generally functioned through tightly knit committees, commonly highly centralised and with strong bureaucratic proclivities. In Asturias, the UGT tried to perpetuate this form wherever possible ... But the mountainous terrain of Asturias made such committees difficult to co-ordinate, so that each one became an isolated miniature central committee of its own, often retaining its traditional authoritarian character.” The anarchists, on the other hand, “favoured looser structures, often quasi-councils composed of factory workers and assemblies composed of peasants. The ambience of these fairly decentralised structures, their improvisatory character and libertarian spirit, fostered an almost festive atmosphere in Anarchist-held areas.” [Op. Cit., p. 249] Bookchin quotes an account which compares anarchist La Felguera with Marxist Sama, towns of equal size and separated only by the Nalon river:

“[The October Insurrection] triumphed immediately in the metallurgical and in the mining town... Sama was organised along military lines. Dictatorship of the proletariat, red army, Central Committee, discipline. authority ... La Felguera opted for **comunismo libertario**: the people in arms, liberty to come and go, respect for the technicians of the Duro-Felguera metallurgical plant, public deliberations of all issues, abolition of money, the rational distribution of food and clothing. Enthusiasm and gaiety in La Felguera; the sullenness of the barracks in Sama. The bridges [of Sama] were held by a corp of guards complete with officers and all. No one could enter or leave Sama without a safe-conduct pass, or walk through the streets without passwords. All of this was ridiculously useless, because the government troops were far away and the Sama bourgeoisie disarmed and neutralised ... The workers of Sama who did not adhere to the Marxist religion preferred to go to La Felguera, where at least they could breathe. Side by side there were two concepts of socialism: the authoritarian and the libertarian; on each bank of the Nalon, two populations of brothers began a new life: with dictatorship in Sama; with liberty in La Felguera.” [Op. Cit., pp. 249–50]

Bookchin notes that “[i]n contrast to the severely delimited Marxist committee in Sama, La Felguera workers met in popular assembly, where they socialised the industrial city’s economy. The

*population was divided into wards, each of which elected delegates to supply and distribution committees... The La Felguera commune ... proved to be so successful, indeed so admirable, that surrounding communities invited the La Felguera Anarchists to advise them on reorganising their own social order. Rarely were comparable institutions created by the Socialists and, where they did emerge, it was on the insistence of the rank-and-file workers.” [Op. Cit., p. 250]*

In other words, the Asturias uprising saw anarchists yet again applying their ideas with great success in a revolutionary situation. As Bookchin argues:

*“Almost alone, the Anarchists were to create viable revolutionary institutions structured around workers’ control of industry and peasants’ control of land. That these institutions were to be duplicated by Socialist workers and peasants was due in small measure to Anarchist example rather than Socialist precept. To the degree that the Asturian miners and industrial workers in various communities established direct control over the local economy and structured their committees along libertarian lines, these achievements were due to Anarchist precedents and long years of propaganda and education.” [Op. Cit., p. 250–1]*

Unlike their Socialist and Communist allies, the anarchists in Asturias took the Alianza’s slogan “Unity, Proletarian Brothers” seriously. A key factor in the defeat of the uprising (beyond its isolation due to socialist incompetence elsewhere — see section 6) was the fact that “[s]o far as the Aviles and Gijon Anarchists were concerned ... their Socialist and Communist ‘brothers’ were to honour the slogan only in the breach. When Anarchist delegates from the seaports arrived in Oviedo on October 7, pleading for arms to resist the imminent landings of government troops, their requests were totally ignored by Socialists and Communists who, as [historian Gabriel] Jackson notes, ‘clearly mistrusted them.’ The Oviedo Committee was to pay a bitter price for its refusal. The next day, when Anarchist resistance, hampered by the pitiful supply of weapons, failed to prevent the government from landing its troops, the way into Asturias lay open. The two seaports became the principal military bases for launching the savage repression of the Asturian insurrection that occupied so much of October and claimed thousands of lives.” [Murray Bookchin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 248]

Therefore, to state as Morrow does that before July 1936, “anarchism had never been tested on a grand scale” and now “leading great masses, it was to have a definite test” is simply wrong. [*Op. Cit.*, p. 101] Anarchism had had numerous definite tests before involving “great masses,” both in Spain and elsewhere. The revolts of the 1930s, the Makhnovists in the Ukraine, the factory occupations in Italy in 1920 (see section A.5.5) and in numerous other revolutionary and near revolutionary situations anarchism had been tested **and had passed** those tests. Defeat came about by the actions of the Marxists (in the case of Asturias and Italy) or by superior force (as in the 1932 and 1933 Spanish insurrections and the Ukraine) **not** because of anarchist theory or activities. At no time did they collaborate with the bourgeois state or compromise their politics. By concentrating on July 1936, Marxists effectively distort the history of anarchism — a bit like arguing the actions of the Social Democratic Party in crushing the German discredits Marxism while ignoring the actions and politics of the council communists during it or the Russian Revolution.

But the question remains, why did the CNT and FAI make such a mess (politically at least) of the Spanish Revolution of 1936? However, even this question is unfair as the example of the Aragon Defence Council and Federation of Collectives indicate that anarchists **did** apply their ideas successfully in certain areas during that revolution.

Morrow is aware of that example, as he argues that the “*Catalonian [i.e. CNT] militia marched into Aragon as an army of social liberation ... Arriving in a village, the militia committees sponsor the election of a village anti-fascist committee ... [which] organises production on a new basis*” and “[e]very village wrested from the fascists was transformed into a forest of revolution.” Its “*municipal councils were elected directly by the communities. The Council of Aragon was at first largely anarchist.*” He notes that “[l]ibertarian principles were attempted in the field of money and wages” yet he fails to mention the obvious application of libertarian principles in the field of **politics** with the state abolished and replaced by a federation of workers’ associations. To do so would be to invalidate his basic thesis against anarchism and so it goes unmentioned, hoping the reader will not notice this confirmation of anarchist **politics** in practice. [Op. Cit., p. 53, p. 204 and p. 205]

So, from the experience of the Ukraine, the previous revolts in 1932, 1933 and 1934 and the example of the Council of Aragon it appears clear that rather than exposing anarchist theory (as Marxists claim), the example of July 1936 in Catalonia is an aberration. Anarchist politics had been confirmed as a valid revolutionary theory many times before and, indeed, shown themselves as the only one to ensure a free society. However, why did this aberration occur?

Most opponents of anarchism provide a rather (in)famous quote from FAI militant Juan Garcia Oliver, describing the crucial decision made in Catalonia in July of ’36 to co-operate with Companys’ government to explain the failure of the CNT to “seize power”:

*“The CNT and FAI decided on collaboration and democracy, eschewing revolutionary totalitarianism ... by the anarchist and Confederal dictatorship.”* [quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 105]

In this statement Garcia Oliver describes the capitalist state as “*democracy*” and refers to the alternative of the directly democratic CNT unions taking power as “*totalitarianism*” and “*dictatorship*.” Marxists tend to think this statement tells us something about the CNT’s original program in the period leading up to the crisis of July 1936. As proven above, any such assertion would be false (see also section 8). In fact this statement was made in December of 1937, many months after Garcia Oliver and other influential CNT activists had embarked upon collaboration in the government ministries and Republican army command. The quote is taken from a report by the CNT leadership, presented by Garcia Oliver and Mariano Vazquez (CNT National Secretary in 1937) at the congress of the International Workers Association (IWA). The CNT was aware that government participation was in violation of the principles of the IWA and the report was intended to provide a rationalisation. That report is an indication of just how far Garcia Oliver and other influential CNT radicals had been corrupted by the experience of government collaboration.

Garcia Oliver’s position in July of 1936 had been entirely different. He had been one of the militants to argue in favour of overthrowing the Companys government in Catalonia in the crucial union assemblies of July 20–21. As Juan Gomez Casas argues:

*“The position supported by Juan Garcia Oliver [in July of ’36] has been described as ‘anarchist dictatorship’ Actually, though, Oliver was advocating application of the goals of the Saragossa Congress in Barcelona and Catalonia at a time in history when, in his opinion, libertarian communism was a real possibility. It would always signify dissolution of the old parties dedicated to the idea of [state] power, or at least make it impossible for them to pursue their politics aimed at seizure of power. There will always be pockets*

*of opposition to new experiences and therefore resistance to joining 'the spontaneity of the popular masses.' In addition, the masses would have complete freedom of expression in the unions and in the economic organisations of the revolution as well as in their political organisations."* [Anarchist Organisation: The History of the FAI, p. 188f]

Those libertarians who defended government participation in Spain argued that a non-hierarchical re-organisation of society in Catalonia in July of '36 could only have been imposed by force, against the opposition of the parties and sectors of society that have a vested interest in existing inequalities. They argued that this would have been a "dictatorship," no better than the alternative of government collaboration.

If this argument were valid, then it logically means that anarchism itself would be impossible, for there will always be sectors of society — bosses, judges, politicians, etc. — who will oppose social re-organisation on a libertarian basis. As Malatesta once argued, some people "*seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!*" [Anarchy, p. 41] It is doubtful he would have predicted that certain anarchists would be included in such believers!

Neither anarchism nor the CNT program called for suppressing other viewpoints. The various viewpoints that existed among the workforce and population would be reflected in the deliberations and debates of the workplace and community assemblies as well as in the various local and regional congresses and conference and on their co-ordinating Councils. The various political groups would be free to organise, publish their periodicals and seek influence in the various self-managed assemblies and structures that existed. The CNT would be dominant because it had overwhelming support among the workers of Catalonia (and would have remained dominant as long as that continued).

What is essential to a state is that its authority and armed power be top-down, separate and distinct from the population. Otherwise it could not function to protect the power of a boss class. When a population in society directly and democratically controls the armed force (in fact, effectively is the armed force as in the case of the CNT militias), directly manages its own affairs in decentralised, federal organisations based on self-management from the bottom upwards and manages the economy, this is not a "state" in the historical sense. Thus the CNT would not in any real sense had "seized power" in Catalonia, rather it would have allowed the mass of people, previously disempowered by the state, to take control of their own lives — both individually and collectively — by smashing the state and replacing it by a free federation of workers' associations.

What this means is that a non-hierarchical society must be imposed by the working class against the opposition of those who would lose power. In building the new world we must destroy the old one. Revolutions are authoritarian by their very nature, but only in respect to structures and social relations which promote injustice, hierarchy and inequality. It is not "authoritarian" to destroy authority, in other words! Revolutions, above all else, must be libertarian in respect to the oppressed (indeed, they are acts of liberation in which the oppressed end their oppression by their own direct action). That is, they must develop structures that involve the great majority of the population, who have previously been excluded from decision making about social and economic issues.

So the dilemma of "anarchist dictatorship" or "collaboration" was a false one and fundamentally wrong. It was never a case of banning parties, etc. under an anarchist system, far from it.

Full rights of free speech, organisation and so on should have existed for all but the parties would only have as much influence as they exerted in union, workplace, community, militia (and so on) assemblies, as should be the case! “Collaboration” yes, but within the rank and file and within organisations organised in a libertarian manner. Anarchism does not respect the “freedom” to be a capitalist, boss or politician.

Instead of this “collaboration” from the bottom up, the CNT and FAI committees favoured “collaboration” from the top down. In this they followed the example of the UGT and its “*Workers’ Alliances*” rather than their own activities previous to the military revolt. Why? Why did the CNT and FAI in Catalonia reject their previous political perspective and reject the basis ideas of anarchism? As shown above, the CNT and FAI has successfully applied their ideas in many insurrections before hand. Why the change of direction? There were two main reasons.

Firstly, while a majority in Catalonia and certain other parts of Spain, the CNT and FAI were a minority in such areas as Castille and Asturias. To combat fascism required the combined forces of all parties and unions and by collaborating with a UGT-like “Anti-Fascist Alliance” in Catalonia, it was believed that such alliances could be formed elsewhere, with equality for the CNT ensured by the Catalan CNT’s decision of equal representation for minority organisations in the Catalan Anti-Fascist Committee. This would, hopefully, also ensure aid to CNT militias via the government’s vast gold reserves and stop foreign intervention by Britain and other countries to protect their interests if libertarian communism was declared.

However, as Vernon Richards argues:

*“This argument contains ... two fundamental mistakes, which many of the leaders of the CNT-FAI have since recognised, but for which there can be no excuse, since they were not mistakes of judgement but the deliberate abandonment of the principles of the CNT. Firstly, that an armed struggle against fascism or any other form of reaction could be waged more successfully within the framework of the State and subordinating all else, including the transformation of the economic and social structure of the country, to winning the war. Secondly, that it was essential, and possible, to collaborate with political parties — that is politicians — honestly and sincerely, and at a time when power was in the hands of the two workers organisations...”*

*“All the initiative ... was in the hands of the workers. The politicians were like generals without armies floundering in a desert of futility. Collaboration with them could not, by any stretch of the imagination, strengthen resistance to Franco. On the contrary, it was clear that collaboration with political parties meant the recreation of governmental institutions and the transferring of initiative from the armed workers to a central body with executive powers. By removing the initiative from the workers, the responsibility for the conduct of the struggle and its objectives were also transferred to a governing hierarchy, and this could not have other than an adverse effect on the morale of the revolutionary fighters.” [Lessons of the Spanish Revolution, p. 42]*

In addition, in failing to take the initiative to unite the working class independently of the Republican state at the crucial moment, in July of ’36, the CNT of Catalonia was in effect abandoning the only feasible alternative to the Popular Front strategy. Without a libertarian system of popular self-management, the CNT and FAI had no alternative but to join the bourgeois state. For a revolution to be successful, as Bakunin and Kropotkin argued, it needs to create libertarian

organisations (such as workers' associations, free communes and their federations) which can effectively replace the state and the market, that is to create a widespread libertarian organisation for social and economic decision making through which working class people can start to set their own agendas. Only by going this can the state and capitalism be effectively smashed. If this is not done and the state is ignored rather than smashed, it continues and gets stronger as it will be the only medium that exists for wide scale decision making. This will result in revolutionaries having to work within it, trying to influence it since no other means exist to reach collective decisions.

The failure to smash the state, this first betrayal of anarchist principles, led to all the rest, and so the defeat of the revolution. Not destroying the state meant that the revolution could never be fully successful economically as politics and economics are bound together so closely. Only under the political conditions of anarchism can its economic conditions flourish and vice versa.

The CNT had never considered a "strategy" of collaboration with the Popular Front prior to July of '36. In the months leading up to the July explosion, the CNT had consistently criticised the Popular Front strategy as a fake unity of leaders over the workers, a strategy that would subordinate the working class to capitalist legality. However, in July of '36, the CNT conferences in Catalonia had not seen clearly that their "temporary" participation in the Anti-Fascist Militia Committee would drag them inexorably into a practice of collaboration with the Popular Front. As Christie argues, *"the Militias Committee was a compromise, an artificial political solution ... It ... drew the CNT-FAI leadership inexorably into the State apparatus, until then its principle enemy, and led to the steady erosion of anarchist influence and credibility."* [Op. Cit., p. 105]

Secondly, the fear of fascism played a key role. After all, this was 1936. The CNT and FAI had seen their comrades in Italy and Germany being crushed by fascist dictatorships, sent to concentration camps and so on. In Spain, Franco's forces were slaughtering union and political militants and members by the tens of thousands (soon to reach hundreds of thousands by the end of the war and beyond). The insurrection had not been initiated by the people themselves (as had the previous revolts in the 1930s) and this also had a psychological impact on the decision making process. The anarchists were, therefore, in a position of being caught between two evils — fascism and the bourgeois state, elements of which had fought with them on the streets. To pursue anarchist politics at such a time, it was argued, could have resulted in the CNT fighting on two fronts — against the fascists and also against the Republican government. Such a situation would have been unbearable and so it was better to accept collaboration than aid Fascism by dividing the forces of the anti-fascist camp.

However, such a perspective failed to appreciate the depth of hatred the politicians and bourgeois had for the CNT. Indeed, by their actions it would appear they preferred fascism to the social revolution. So, in the name of "anti-fascist" unity, the CNT worked with parties and classes which hated both them and the revolution. In the words of Sam Dolgoff *"both before and after July 19<sup>th</sup>, an unwavering determination to crush the revolutionary movement was the leitmotif behind the policies of the Republican government; irrespective of the party in power."* [The Anarchist Collectives, p. 40]

Rather than eliminate a civil war developing within the civil war, the policy of the CNT just postponed it — until such time as the state was stronger than the working class. The Republican government was quite happy to attack the gains of the revolution, physically attacking rural and urban collectives, union halls, assassinating CNT and FAI members of so on. The difference was



the CNT's act only postponed such conflict until the balance of power had shifted back towards the status quo.

Moreover, the fact that the bourgeois republic was fighting fascism could have meant that it would have tolerated the CNT social revolution rather than fight it (and so weakening its own fight against Franco). However, such an argument remains moot.

It is clear that anti-fascism destroyed the revolution, not fascism. As a Scottish anarchist in Barcelona during the revolution argued, "*Fascism is not something new, some new force of evil opposed to society, but is only the old enemy, Capitalism, under a new and fearful sounding name ... Anti-Fascism is the new slogan by which the working class is being betrayed.*" [Ethal McDonald, **Workers Free Press**, Oct. 1937] This was also argued by the **Friends of Durruti** who stated that "[d]emocracy defeated the Spanish people, not Fascism." [**The Friends of Durruti Accuse**]

The majority at the July 20–21 conferences went along with proposal of postponing the social revolution, of starting the work of creating libertarian communism, and smashing the state and replacing it with a federation of workers' assemblies. Most of the CNT militants there saw it as a temporary expedient, until the rest of Spain was freed from Franco's forces (in particular, Aragon and Saragossa). Companys' (the head of the Catalan government) had proposed the creation of a body containing representatives of all anti-fascist parties and unions called the "*Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias*," sponsored by his government. The CNT meeting agreed to this proposal, though only on condition that the CNT be given the majority on it. A sizeable minority of delegates were apparently disgusted by this decision. The delegation from Bajo Llobregat County (an industrial area south of Barcelona) walked out saying they would never go along with government collaboration.

Therefore, the decision to postpone the revolution and so to ignore the state rather than smashing was a product of isolation and the fear of a fascist victory. However, while "isolation" may explain the Catalan militants' fears and so decisions, it does not justify their decision. If the CNT of Catalonia had given Companys the boot and set up a federation of workplace and community assemblies in Catalonia, uniting the rank-and-file of the other unions with the CNT, this would have strengthened the resolve of workers in other parts of Spain, and it might have also inspired workers in nearby countries to move in a similar direction.

Isolation, the uneven support for a libertarian revolution across Spain and the dangers of fascism were real problems, but they do not excuse the libertarian movement for its mistakes. On the contrary, in following the course of action advised by leaders like Horacio Prieto and Abad Diego de Santillan, the CNT only weakened the revolution and helped to discredit libertarian socialism. After all, as Bakunin and Kropotkin continually stressed, revolutions break out in specific areas and then spread outward — isolation is a feature of revolution which can only be overcome by action, by showing a practical example which others can follow.

Most of the CNT militants at the July 20<sup>th</sup> meeting saw the compromise as a temporary expedient, until the rest of Spain was freed from Franco's forces (in particular, Aragon and Saragossa). As the official account states, "[t]he situation was considered and it was unanimously decided not to mention Libertarian Communism until such time as we had captured that part of Spain that was in the hands of the rebels." [quoted by Christie, **Op. Cit.**, p. 102] However, the membership of the CNT decided **themselves** to start the social revolution ("*very rapidly collectives ... began to spring up. It did not happen on instructions from the CNT leadership ... the initiative came from CNT militants*") [Ronald Fraser, **Blood of Spain**, p. 349]). The social revolution began anyway, from below,

but without the key political aspect (abolition of the state) and so was fatally compromised from the beginning.

As Stuart Christie argues:

*“The higher committees of the CNT-FAI-FIJI in Catalonia saw themselves caught on the horns of a dilemma: social revolution, fascism or bourgeois democracy. Either they committed themselves to the solutions offered by social revolution, regardless of the difficulties involved in fighting both fascism and international capitalism, or, through fear of fascism ... they sacrificed their anarchist principles and revolutionary objectives to bolster, to become part of the bourgeois state ... Faced with an imperfect state of affairs and preferring defeat to a possibly Pyrrhic victory, Catalan anarchist leadership renounced anarchism in the name of expediency and removed the social transformation of Spain from their agenda.*

*“But what the CNT-FAI leaders failed to grasp was that the decision whether or not to implement Libertarian Communism was not theirs to make. Anarchism was not something which could be transformed from theory to practice by organisational decree...*

*“What the CNT-FAI leadership had failed to take on board was the fact that the spontaneous defensive movement of 19 July had developed a political direction of its own. On their own initiative, without any intervention by the leadership of the unions or political parties, the rank and file militants of the CNT, representing the dominant force within the Barcelona working class, together with other union militants had, with the collapse of State power, ... been welded ... into genuinely popular non-partisan revolutionary committees ... in their respective neighbourhoods. They were the natural organisms of the revolution itself and direct expression of popular power.” [Op. Cit., p. 99]*

In other words, the bulk of the CNT-FAI membership acted in an anarchist way while the higher committees compromised their politics and achievements in the name of anti-fascist unity. In this the membership followed years of anarchist practice and theory. It was fear of fascism which made many of the leading militants of the CNT abandon anarchist politics and instead embrace “anti-fascist unity” and compromise with the bourgeois republic. To claim that July 1936 indicated the failure of anarchism means to ignore the constructive work of millions of CNT members in their workplaces, communities and militias and instead concentrate on a few militants who made the terrible mistake of ignoring their political ideas in an extremely difficult situation. As we said above, this may explain the decision but it does not justify it.

Therefore, it is clear that the experiences of the CNT and FAI in 1936 indicate a failure of anarchists to apply their politics rather than the failure of those politics. The examples of the Makhnovists, the revolts in Spain between 1932 and 1934 as well as the Council of Aragon show beyond doubt that this is the case. Rather than act as anarchists in July 1936, the militants of the Catalan CNT and FAI ignored their basic ideas (not lightly, we stress, but in response to real dangers). They later justified their decisions by putting their options in a Marxist light — “either we impose libertarian communism, and so become an anarchist dictatorship, or we collaborate with the democratic government.” As Vernon Richards makes clear:

*“Such alternatives are contrary to the most elementary principles of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism. In the first place, an ‘anarchist dictatorship’ is a contradiction*

*in terms (in the same way as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is), for the moment anarchists impose their social ideas on the people by force, they cease being anarchists ... the arms of the CNT-FAI held could be no use for imposing libertarian communism ... The power of the people in arms can only be used in the defence of the revolution and the freedoms won by their militancy and their sacrificed. We do not for one moment assume that all social revolutions are necessarily anarchist. But whatever form the revolution against authority takes, the role of anarchists is clear: that of inciting the people to abolish capitalistic property and the institutions through which it exercises its power for the exploitation of the majority by a minority... the role of anarchists [is] to support, to incite and encourage the development of the social revolution and to frustrate any attempts by the bourgeois capitalist state to reorganise itself, which it would seek to do."*  
[Op. Cit., pp. 43–6]

Their compromise in the name of anti-fascist unity contained the rest of their mistakes. Joining the "Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias" was the second mistake as at no time could it be considered as the embryo of a new workers' power. It was, rather, an organisation like the pre-war UGT "Workers' Alliances" — an attempt to create links between the top-level of other unions and parties. Such an organisation, as the CNT recognised before the war (see section 5), could not be a means of creating a revolutionary federation of workers' associations and communes and, in fact, a hindrance to such a development, if not its chief impediment.

Given that the CNT had rejected the call for revolution in favour of anti-fascist unit on July 20<sup>th</sup>, such a development does not reflect the CNT's pre-war program. Rather it was a reversion to Felix Morrow's Trotskyist position of joining the UGT's "Workers' Alliance" in spite of its non-revolutionary nature (see section 5).

The CNT did not carry out its program (and so apply anarchist politics) and so did not replace the Generalitat (Catalan State) with a Defence Council in which only union/workplace assemblies (not political parties) were represented. To start the process of creating libertarian communism all the CNT would have had to do was to call a Regional Congress of unions and invite the UGT, independent unions and unorganised workplaces to send delegates. It could also have invited the various neighbourhood and village defence committees that had either sprung up spontaneously or were already organised before the war as part of the CNT. Unlike the other revolts it took part in the 1930s, the CNT did not apply anarchist politics. However, to judge anarchism by this single failure means to ignore the whole history of anarchism and its successful applications elsewhere, including by the CNT and FAI during numerous revolts in Spain during the 1930s and in Aragon in 1936.

Ironically enough, Kropotkin had attacked the official CNT line of not mentioning Libertarian Communism "until such time as we had captured that part of Spain that was in the hands of the rebels." In analysing the Paris Commune Kropotkin had lambasted those who had argued "Let us first make sure of victory, and then see what can be done." His comments are worth quoting at length:

*"Make sure of victory! As if there were any way of forming a free commune without laying hands upon property! As if there were any way of conquering the foe while the great mass of the people is not directly interested in the triumph of the revolution, by seeing that it will bring material, moral and intellectual well-being to everybody.*

*“The same thing happened with regard to the principle of government. By proclaiming the free Commune, the people of Paris proclaimed an essential anarchist principle, which was the breakdown of the state.*

*“And yet, if we admit that a central government to regulate the relations of communes between themselves is quite needless, why should we admit its necessity to regulate the mutual relations of the groups which make up each commune? ... There is no more reason for a government inside the commune than for a government outside.” [The Commune of Paris]*

Kropotkin’s argument was sound, as the CNT discovered. By waiting until victory in the war they were defeated. Kropotkin also indicated the inevitable effects of the CNT’s actions in co-operating with the state and joining representative bodies. In his words:

*“Paris sent her devoted sons to the town hall. There, shelved in the midst of files of old papers, obliged to rule when their instincts prompted them to be and to act among the people, obliged to discuss when it was needful to act, to compromise when no compromise was the best policy, and, finally, losing the inspiration which only comes from continual contact with the masses, they saw themselves reduced to impotence. Being paralysed by their separation from the people — the revolutionary centre of light and heat — they themselves paralysed the popular initiative.” [Op. Cit.]*

Which, in a nutshell, was what happened to the leading militants of the CNT who collaborated with the state. As anarchist turned Minister admitted after the war, “[w]e were in the government, but the streets were slipping away from us. We had lost the workers’ trust and the movement’s unity had been whittled away.” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 2, p. 274] The actions of the CNT-FAI higher committees and Ministers helped paralyse and defeat the May Days revolt of 1937. The CNT committees and leaders become increasingly isolated from the people, they compromised again and again and, ultimately, became an impotent force. Kropotkin was proved correct. Which means that far from refuting anarchist politics or analysis, the experience of the CNT-FAI in the Spanish Revolution **confirms** it.

In summary, therefore, the Spanish Revolution of 1936 indicates the failure of anarchists rather than the failure of anarchism.

One last point, it could be argued that anarchist theory allowed the leadership of the CNT and FAI to paint their collaboration with the state as a libertarian policy. That is, of course, correct. Anarchism is against the so-called “dictatorship of the proletariat” just as much as it is against the actual dictatorship of the bourgeoisie (i.e. the existing system and its off-shoots such as fascism). This allowed the CNT and FAI leaders to argue that they were following anarchist theory by not destroying the state completely in July 1936. Of course, such a position cannot be used to discredit anarchism simply because such a revision meant that it can never be libertarian to abolish government and the state. In other words, the use made of anarchist theory by the leaders of the CNT and FAI in this case presents nothing else than a betrayal of that theory rather than its legitimate use.

Also, and more importantly, while anarchist theory was corrupted to justify working with other parties and unions in a democratic state, Marxist theory was used to justify the brutal one-party dictatorship of the Bolsheviks, first under Lenin and the Stalin. That, we feel, sums up the difference between anarchism and Leninism quite well.

# Reply to errors and distortions in Phil Mitchinson's *Marxism and direct action*

Phil Mitchinson essay **Marxism and direct action** attempts to provide a “Marxist” (i.e. Leninist/Trotskyist) critique of the current “Direct Action” based groups which came to notice at various demonstrations across the world — most famously in Seattle, November 1999. He, correctly, links these groups and currents with anarchism. However, his “critique” is nothing but a self-contradictory collection of false assertions, lies and nonsense, as we shall prove (indeed, his “critique” seems more the product of envy at anarchist influence in these movements than the product of scholarship or objectivity). That is why we have decided to reply to his article — it gives us an ideal possibility to indicate the depths to which some Marxists will swoop to distort anarchist politics and movements.

## 1. How does Mitchinson impoverish the politics of the direct action groups?

He begins by noting that the *“recent anti-capitalist demonstrations have brought together many different groups protesting against the destruction of the environment, racism, the exploitation of the third world, and also many ordinary young people protesting at the state of things in general. They have certainly shattered the myth that everyone is happy and that the capitalist system is accepted as the only possible form of society.”* Of course, this is correct. What he fails to mention is that these demonstrations and groups managed to do this **without** the “guidance” of any Leninist party — indeed, the vanguard parties are noticeable by their absence and their frantic efforts to catch up with these movements. This, of course, is not the first time this has happened. Looking at every revolution we discover the “revolutionary” parties either playing no role in their early stages or a distinctly counter-productive role.

He states that *“[a]ll around us we see the misery this system causes. Famine, war, unemployment, homelessness and despair, these are the violent acts that the system perpetrates against millions every day.”* However, as much as these aspects of capitalism are terrible, the anti-capitalist revolt expressed by many within the direct action groups is much wider than this (standard) leftist list. The movements, or at least parts of them, have a much more radical critique of the evils of capitalism — one that bases it self on abolishing alienation, domination, wage slavery, oppression, exploitation, the spiritual as well as material poverty of everyday life, by means of self-management, autonomy, self-organisation and direct action. They raise the possibility of playful, meaningful, empowering and productive self-activity to replace *“tedious, over-tiring jobs”* as well as the vision of a libertarian communist (i.e. moneyless, stateless) society. Mitchinson’s account of the movements he is trying to critique is as poverty stricken intellectually as the capitalist system these movements are challenging. Leninists like Mitchinson, instead of a swallowing a dose of humility

and learning from the very different ways this new wave of protest is being framed, are trying to squeeze the protest into their own particular one-dimensional model of revolution. Being unable to understand the movements he is referring to, he pushes their vision into the narrow confines of his ideology and distorts it.

He goes on to state that “[w]itnessing and experiencing this destruction and chaos, young people everywhere are driven to protest.” Of course, anyone who is part of these movements will tell you that a wide cross-section of age groups are involved, not just “young people.” However, Mitchinson’s comments on age are not surprising — ever since Lenin, Bolshevik inspired Marxists have attributed other, more radical, political theories, analyses and visions to the alleged youth of those who hold these opinions (in spite of the facts). In other words, these ideas, they claim, are the produce of immaturity, inexperience and youth and will, hopefully, be grown out of. Just as many parents mutter to themselves that their anarchist (or socialist, homosexual, whatever) children will “grow out of it”, Lenin and his followers like Mitchinson consider themselves as the wiser, older relations (perhaps a friendly Uncle or a Big Brother?) of these “young” rebels and hope they will “grow out of” their infantile politics.

The word patronising does not do Mitchinson justice!

## 2. Does anarchism “juxtapose” theory and action?

Now Mitchinson launches into his first strawman of his essay. He asserts:

*“However, the idea of getting involved in a political organisation is a turn off for many, who understandably want to do something, and do something now. In reality, the attempt to juxtapose organisation, discussion, and debate with ‘direct action’ is pure sophistry.”*

We are not aware of any anarchist or direct action group which does not discuss and debate their actions, the rationale of their actions and the aims of their actions. These demonstrations that “young people” apparently turn up at are, in fact, organised by groups who have meetings, discuss their ideas, their objectives, their politics, and so on. That much should be obvious. In reality, it is Mitchinson who expresses “pure sophistry,” not the “many” who he claims act without thinking. And, of course, he fails to mention the two days of meetings, discussion and debate which took place the Saturday/Sunday before the May Day actions in London. To mention the May Day 2000 conference would confuse the reader with facts and so goes unmentioned.

He then asserts that the “ideas of Marxism are not the subject of academic study, they are precisely a guide to action.” Of course, we have to point out here that the Marxist Parties Mitchinson urges us to build did not take part in organising the actions he praises (a few members of these parties did come along, on some of them, to sell papers, of course, but this is hardly a “vanguard” role). In general, the vanguard parties were noticeable by their absence or, **at best**, their lack of numbers and involvement. If we judge people by what they do, rather than what they say (as Marx urged), then we must draw the conclusion that the Marxism of Mitchinson is a guide to inaction rather than action.

Mitchinson continues by stating Marxists “are all in favour of action, but it must be clearly thought out, with definite aims and objectives if it is to succeed. Otherwise we end up with directionless action.” It would be impolite to point out that no anarchist or member of a direct action

organisation would disagree with this statement. Every anti-capitalist demonstration has had a definite aim and objective, was clearly thought out and organised. It did not “just happen.” Mitchinson presents us with a strawman so fragile that even a breeze of reality would make it disintegrate.

The question is, of course, what kind of organisation do we create, how do we determine our aims and objectives. That is the key question, one that Mitchinson hides behind the strawman of organisation versus non-organisation, planned action versus “*directionless action*.” To state it bluntly, the question is actually one of do we organise in an authoritarian manner or a libertarian manner, not whether or not we organise. Mitchinson may not see the difference (in which case he thinks all organisation is “authoritarian”) but for anarchists and members of direct action groups the difference is vital.

He goes on to state:

*“Furthermore without political organisation who decides what action is to be taken, when and where? There can be no greater direct action than the seizing of control over our own lives by the vast majority of society. In that act lies the essence of revolution. Not just an aimless ‘direct action’ but mass, democratic and conscious action, the struggle not just against capitalism, but for a new form of society, socialism.”*

Again Mitchinson presents us with the strawman of “*conscious*” action verses “*aimless*” action. As noted above, the anti-capitalist demonstrations **were** organised — non-hierarchical groups decided collectively what action was to be organised, when and where. The real question is not organisation versus non-organisation but rather authoritarian versus libertarian organisation. Either decision making from the bottom up or decision making from the top-down. As for there bring “*no greater direct action*” than revolution, well, anarchists have been saying that for over one hundred years — we don’t need a Marxist to tell us our own ideas!

### 3. How does Mitchinson distort the London May Day demo?

He then gets to the crux of the issue — “*So, what comes next?*” He goes on to assert:

*“The organisers of the demo tell us this was not a protest in order to secure changes, reforms apparently are a waste of time. No, simply by participating in what they call the ‘carnival’ we become better people, and eventually more and more people will participate, until a critical mass is reached and we all ignore capitalism, don’t pay our bills, until they go away. What an infantile flight of fancy!”*

Yes, indeed, what an infantile flight of fancy! However, the flight is purely Mitchinson’s. No one in RTS (or any other anarchist) makes such a claim. Yes, RTS urged people to take part in a carnival — as they argue, “[*m*]any of the great moments of revolutionary history were carnivalesque ... But we are not waiting for these moments of carnivalesque revolution, we are trying to merge them into every moment of everyday life. We cannot live on one-off days, a letting of steam, safety valves for society enabling life to return to normal the next day or for hierarchical domination to return, as did in so many historical revolutions. Revolution is not an act but a process and carnival can prepare us for this process.” [Maybe, p. 9] Thus “*carnival*” is **not** seen as an end to itself (as Mitchinson

asserts) but rather an aid to the creation of a revolutionary movement. Mitchinson confuses a celebration of May Day with an insurrection! In the words of **Maybe**:

*“And although Mayday is just one day, it seeks to incite continuous creativity and action towards a radical remaking of everyday life. Steeped in a history of daily struggle, of ‘day in day out’ organising for social change, but pulsating with the celebration of renewal and fresh hope that returns with the coming of summer. Mayday will always be a pivotal moment.” [Maybe, p. 5]*

**Maybe** is clear — we need to organise the daily struggle and enjoy ourselves while we are at it. Mitchinson’s distortion of that message is pitiful.

#### 4. Do anarchists really think *“the bosses will do nothing to defend their system”*?

He continues:

*“The genuine intentions of those protesting is not open to question. However, the way to hell is paved with many such good intentions. Are we really to believe that whilst we all ‘place ourselves outside of capitalism’, the bosses will do nothing to defend their system? This ostrich like tactic of burying our heads in the sand until they go away is not serious. Nor is it action. In reality, it is irresponsible, indirect inaction.”*

The comment about *“indirect inaction”* is somewhat funny coming from a political tendency which did not produce a movement of the importance of Seattle 1999 and is now trying to recruit from it. But it would be interesting to discover in which anarchist work comes the notion that we do not think the bosses will not defend their system. Yes, Lenin did claim that anarchists would *“lay down their arms”* after a revolution, but as Murray Bookchin notes, anarchists are *“not so naïve as to believe anarchism could be established overnight. In imputing this notion to Bakunin, Marx and Engels wilfully distorted the Russian anarchist’s views. Nor did the anarchists ... believe that the abolition of the state involved ‘laying down arms’ immediately after the revolution...”* [**Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 213] Bakunin, for example, thought the *“Commune would be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades”* and that *“the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction ... it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution.”* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 170 and p. 171]

Moreover, RTS actions have continually come into conflict with the state and its forces of defence. Mitchinson seems to think that the participants of RTS and its demonstrations are incapable of actually understanding and learning from their experiences — they have seen and felt the capitalist system defending itself. Anyone on the J18, N30, A16 or M1 demos or just watching them on TV would have seen the capitalist system defending itself with vigour — and the protestors **fighting back**. Rather than acknowledge the obvious, Mitchinson asserts nonsense. The only person burying their head in the sand is Mitchinson if he ignores the experiences of his



own senses (and the basic principles of materialism) in favour of an ideological diatribe with no basis in reality.

What is “irresponsible” is misrepresenting the viewpoints of your enemies and expecting them not to point out your errors.

## 5. How does Mitchinson misrepresent anarchist organisation?

Mitchinson now moves onto the real enemy, anarchism. He asserts that:

*“Anarchist organisations have always hidden behind a facade of ‘self-organisation’. They claim to have no leaders, no policy etc. Yet who decides?”*

Yes, anarchist groups claim to have no leaders but they do not claim to be without policies. Anyone with any comprehension of anarchist theory and history would know this (just one example, Bakunin argued that we needed to establish “a genuine workers’ program — the policy of the International [Workers Association]” [“The Policy of the International”, **The Basic Bakunin**, p. 100]).

Mitchinson asks the question, if we do not have leaders, “who decides?” That in itself exposes the authoritarian nature of his politics and the Bolshevik style party. He obviously cannot comprehend that, without leaders deciding things for us, we manage our own affairs — we decide the policy of our organisations collectively, by the direct democracy of the membership. Forgetting his early comment of that there is “no greater direct action than the seizing of control over our own lives by the vast majority of society,” he now asks how the vast majority of society can seize control over our own lives without leaders to tell us what to do!

Anarchists reject the idea of leaders — instead we argue for the “**leadership of ideas**.” As we discuss this concept in section J.3.6 and so will not do so here. However, the key concept is that anarchists seek to spread their ideas by discussing their politics as **equals** in popular organisations and convincing the mass assemblies of these bodies by argument. Rather than using these bodies to be elected to positions of power (i.e. leadership as it is traditionally understood) anarchists consider it essential that power remains in the hands of the base of an organisation and argue that the policies of the organisation be decided by the member directly in assemblies and co-ordinated by conferences of mandated, recallable delegates (see section A.2.9 for more discussion).

This is to be expected, of course, as anarchists believe that a free society can only be created by organisations which reflect the principles of that society. Hence we see policies being made by those affected by them and oppose attempts to turn self-managed organisations into little more than vehicles to elect “leaders.” A free society is a self-managed one and can only be created by self-management in the class struggle or revolutionary process. All that revolutionaries should do is try and influence the decisions these organisations make by discussing our ideas with their membership — simply as any other member could in the mass assemblies the organisation is built upon. Any attempt by revolutionaries to seize power upon behalf of these organisations means destroying their revolutionary potential and the revolution itself by replacing the participation of all with the power of a few (the party).

Thus anarchist theory and practice is very clear on the question “who decides” — it is those who are affected by the question via group assemblies and conferences of mandated, recallable

delegates. Rather than have “no policy,” policy in an anarchist organisation is decided directly by the membership. Without “leaders” — without power delegated into the hands of a few — who else **could** make the decisions and policy? That Mitchinson cannot comprehend this implies that he cannot envision a society without a few telling the many what to do.

He continues:

*“If there was no leadership and no policy then there could be no action of any kind. The recent demonstrations have been highly organised and co-ordinated on an international scale. Good, so it should be. However, without organisation and democracy no-one, except a clique at the top, has any say in why, where and when. Such a movement will never bring international capital trembling to its knees.”*

Firstly, we must point out that these demonstrations which have spread like wild-fire across the world have, most definitely, made international capital nervous. Secondly, we must point out that no Leninist vanguards were involved in organising them (a few members turned up to sell papers later, once their significance had registered with the party leadership). Thirdly, we must point out that no Leninist vanguard has made “international capital” tremble in the knees for quite a few decades — since 1917, only Stalinist vanguards have had any effect (and, of course, “international capital” soon realised they could work with the Bolsheviks and other “Communist” leaders as one ruling elite with another). It seems somewhat ironic that a Leninist, whose movement was noticeable in its absence, mocks the first movement to scare the ruling class for nearly 30 years.

Secondly, we must note that the policy decided upon by the multitude of groups across the world was decided upon by the members of those groups. They practised organisation and **direct** democracy to make their policy decisions and implement them. Given that Mitchinson wonders how people can make decisions without leaders, his comments about rule by “a clique at the top” are somewhat ironic. As the history of the Russian Revolution indicates, a highly centralised state system (which mimics the highly centralised party) soon results in rule by the top party officials, not by the mass of people.

Mitchinson again decides to flog his fallacy of organisation versus non-organisation:

*“One of the best known anarchist groups in Britain, Reclaim the Streets, save the game away in their spoof Mayday publication, ‘Maybe’. Incidentally, who wrote these articles, who decided what went in and what didn’t, who edited it, where did the money come from? Our intention here is not to accuse them of dodgy financing — simply to point out that this ‘no leaders’ stuff is a self-organised myth.”*

It states who put together **MayDay** on page 5 of the paper. It was “an organic group of ‘guerrilla gardeners’” — in other words, members of **Reclaim the Streets** who desired to produce the paper for that event. These people would have joined the group producing it via the weekly RTS open meetings and would have been held accountable to that same open meeting. No great mystery there — if you have even the slightest vision of how a non-hierarchical organisation works. Rather than being a “myth”, RTS shows that we do not need to follow leaders — instead we can manage our own organisations directly and freely participate in projects organised via the main open meeting. Writing articles, editing, and so on are not the work of “leaders” — rather they are simply tasks that need doing. They do not imply a leadership role — if they did then every hack journalist is a “leader.”

He continues to attack what he cannot understand:

*“On page 20 they announce ‘Reclaim the streets is non-hierarchical, spontaneous and self-organised. We have no leaders, no committee, no board of directors, no spokes people. There is no centralised unit for decision making, strategic planning and production of ideology. There is no membership and no formalised commitment. There is no master plan and no pre-defined agenda.’*

*“There are two problems here. Firstly who is ‘we,’ who made the above statement, and who decided it. Secondly, if it were true, it would not be something of which to be proud. Whether you like it or not, there is no way the capitalist system will ever be overthrown by such a haphazard and slipshod method.”*

Taking the first issue, “who is ‘we,’ who made the above statement, and who decided it.” Why, it is the membership of RTS — decided via their weekly open meeting (as mentioned on that page). That Mitchinson cannot comprehend this says a lot about his politics and vision. He cannot comprehend self-management, direct democracy. He seems not to be able to understand that groups can make decisions collectively, without having to elect leaders to make any decisions for them.

Taking the second issue, it is clear that Mitchinson fails to understand the role of RTS (and other anarchist groups). Anarchists do not try to overthrow capitalism **on behalf of others** — they urge them to overthrow it themselves, by their own direct action. The aim of groups like RTS is to encourage people to take direct action, to fight the powers that be and, in the process, create their own organs of self-management and resistance. Such a process of working class self-activity and self-organisation in struggle is the starting process of every revolution. People in struggle create their own organisations — such as soviets (workers’ councils), factory committees, community assemblies — through which they start to manage their own affairs and, hopefully, overthrow the state and abolish capitalism. It is not the task of RTS to overthrow capitalism, it is the task of the whole population.

Moreover, many anarchists do see the need for a specific anarchist organisation — three national federations exist in the UK, for example. RTS does not need to organise in this fashion simply because such groups **already** exist. It is not its role — its role is a means to encourage self-activity and direct action as well as raising libertarian ideas in a popular manner. For more “serious” political organisation, people can and do turn to other anarchist groups and federations.

The street carnival principle of RTS is precisely the type of organising anarchists excel at — namely fun organising that catches the fun and excitement of popular direct action and, most importantly, **gets people out on the streets** — something Marxists have failed to do very well (if at all). It’s a small step from organising a street carnival to further, “more serious” organising. Anarchist revolution is about bringing joy back into human lives, not endless (and often dishonest) polemics on the ideas of long dead philosophers. Rather, it is about creating a philosophy which, while inspired by past thinkers, is not subservient to them and aims to base itself on **current** struggles and needs rather than past ones. It is also about building a new political culture, one that is popular, active, street-based (versus ivory-tower elitist), and above all, fun. Only this way can we catch the imagination of everyday people and move them from resigned apathy to active resistance. The Marxists have tried their approach, and it has been a resounding failure — every-

day people consider Marxism at best irrelevant, and at worst, inhuman and lifeless. Fortunately, anarchists are not following the Marxist model of organising, having learned from history

Thus Mitchinson fails to understand the role of RTS or its position in the UK anarchist movement.

He then asserts:

*“There is no theory, no coherent analysis of society, no alternative programme. To brag of a lack of direction, a lack of purpose and a lack of coherence, in the face of such a highly organised and brutal enemy as international capital, is surely the height of irresponsibility.”*

Firstly, anyone reading **Maybe** or other RTS publications will quickly see there is theory, coherent analysis and an alternative vision. As Mitchinson has obviously read **Maybe** we can only assume his claim is a conscious lie. Secondly, RTS in the quoted passage clearly do **not** “brag of a lack of direction, a lack of purpose and a lack of coherence.” They do state there is no “centralised unit for decision-making” — which is true, they have a **decentralised** unit for decision-making (direct democracy in open meetings). There is “no master-plan,” etc. as any plans are decided upon by these open meetings. There is no pre-defined agenda because, as a democratic organisation, it is up to the open meeting to define their own agenda.

It is only Mitchinson’s **assumption** that only centralised parties, with leaders making the decisions, can have “direction,” “purpose” and “coherence.” As can be seen **by their actions** that RTS **does** have direction, purpose and coherence. Needless to say, while other anarchists may be critical about RTS and its actions, we do not deny that it has been an effective organisation, involving a great many people in its actions who would probably not be involved in political activities. Rather than being “irresponsible,” RTS shows the validity of libertarian organisation and its effectiveness. No Marxist Party has remotely approached RTS’s successes in terms of involving people in political actions. This is hardly a surprise.

## 6. How does Mitchinson define anarchism wrongly?

Mitchinson states:

*“In reality the leaders of these movements are not devoid of ideology, they are anarchists. Anarchism is not simply a term of abuse, it comes from the Greek word ‘anarchos’ meaning ‘without government’. To anarchists the state — the institutions of government, the army, police, courts etc. — is the root cause of all that is wrong in the world. It must be destroyed and replaced not with any new form of government, but the immediate introduction of a stateless society.”*

Firstly, “anarchos” actually means “without authority,” or “contrary to authority” (as Kropotkin put it). It does **not** mean “without government” as such (although it commonly is used that way). This means that anarchism does **not** consider the state as “the root of all that is wrong with the world” — we consider it, like capitalism (wage slavery), patriarchy, hierarchy in general, etc., as a symptom of a deeper problem, namely authority (or, more precisely, authoritarian social relations, hierarchical power — of which class power is a subset). Therefore anarchist theory is

concerned with more than just the state — it is against capitalism just as much as it is against the state, for example.

Thus, to state the obvious, as anyone familiar with anarchist theory could tell you, anarchists do not think that “*the state*” is the root of all that is wrong in the world. Marxists have asserted this for years — unfortunately for them, repetition does not make something true! Rather, anarchists see the state as **one** of the causes of evil in the world and the main protector of all the rest. We also stress that in order to combat all the evils, we need to destroy the state so that we are in a position to abolish the other evils by being in control of our own lives. For example, in order to abolish capitalism — i.e. for workers’ to seize the means of life — the state, which protects property rights, must be destroyed. Without doing so, the police and army will come and take back that which the workers’ have taken. However, we do not claim that the state causes all of our problems — we do claim that getting rid of the state is an essential act, on which many others are dependent.

As Brian Morris argues:

*“Another criticism of anarchism is that it has a narrow view of politics: that it sees the state as the fount of all evil, ignoring other aspects of social and economic life. This is a misrepresentation of anarchism. It partly derives from the way anarchism has been defined, and partly because Marxist historians have tried to exclude anarchism from the broader socialist movement. But when one examines the writings of classical anarchists... as well as the character of anarchist movements... it is clearly evident that it has never had this limited vision. It has always challenged all forms of authority and exploitation, and has been equally critical of capitalism and religion as it has been of the state.”* [“Anthropology and Anarchism,” **Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed**, no. 45, p. 40]

As can be seen, Mitchinson repeats into the usual Marxist straw man.

## 7. Does anarchism reject fighting for reforms?

After asserting the usual Marxist falsehoods about anarchism, he moves on:

*“This opposition to the state and authority leads to a rejection of participation in any form of parliamentary activity, belonging to a political party or fighting for any reforms, that is political change through the state.”*

Again Mitchinson smuggles in a falsehood into his “analysis.” Anarchists do not reject “*fighting for any reforms*” — far from it. We do reject parliamentary activity, that is true, but we think that reforms can and must be won. We see such reforms coming via the direct action of those who desire them — for example, by workers striking for better working conditions, more wages and so. Anyone with even a passing awareness of anarchist thought would know this. Indeed, that is what direct action means — it was coined by French anarcho-syndicalists to describe the struggle for reforms within capitalism!

As for rejecting parliamentary activity, yes, anarchists do reject this form of “action.” However, we do so for reasons Mitchinson fails to mention. Section J.2 of the FAQ discusses the reasons

why anarchists support direct action and oppose electioneering as a means of both reform and for revolution.

Similarly, anarchists reject political parties but we do not reject political organisations — i.e. specific anarchist groups. The difference is that political parties are generally organised in a hierarchical fashion and anarchist federations are not — we try and create the new world when we organise rather than reproducing the traits of the current, bourgeois, one.

Needless to say, Mitchinson seeks to recruit the people he is slandering and so holds out an olive-branch by stating that “[o]f course, Marxism is opposed to the brutal domination of the capitalist state too. Marx saw a future society without a state but instead ‘an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.’ That is a self-governing people. The question however is how can this be achieved?”

Yes, as Bakunin argued, Marxists do not reject our programme out of hand. They claim to also seek a free society and so Mitchinson is correct — the question is how can this be achieved. Anarchists argue that a self-governing people can only be achieved by self-governing means — “Bakunin ... advocated socialist (i.e., libertarian) means in order to achieve a socialist (i.e., libertarian) society.” [Arthur Lehning, “Introduction”, **Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 27] Thus means and ends must be consistent — revolutionary movements must be organised in a way that reflects the society we want to create. Thus a self-governing society can only be created by self-governing organisations and a self-governing movement. If the revolutionary movement reflect bourgeois society — for example, is hierarchical — then it cannot create a free society. That is the rationale for the way anarchist groups organise, including RTS. Marxists, as we will see, disagree and consider how a revolutionary movement organises itself as irrelevant.

Also, we must note that earlier Mitchinson denied that a self-governing organisation could exist when he was discussing RTS. He asserted that “[i]f there was no leadership and no policy then there could be no action of any kind.” Now he claims that it is possible, but only **after** the revolution. We will note the obvious contradiction — how do people become capable of self-government post-revolution if they do not practice it pre-revolution and, obviously, during the revolution?

## 8. Does anarchism see the state as the root of all problems?

Mitchinson moves on to assert that:

*“Since anarchism sees in the state the root of all problems, it therefore believes these problems will be resolved by the destruction of the state.”*

As noted above, anarchists do **not** see in the state the root of all problems. We do urge the destruction of the state but that is because the state is the protector of existing society and in order to transform that society we need get rid of it. Kropotkin, for example, was well aware of “the evil done by Capitalism and the State that supports it.” [Evolution and Environment, p. 83] Rather than seeing the State as the root of all evil, anarchists are well aware that evil is caused by many things — particularly capitalism — and that the state, as well as causing its own evils, supports and protects others. Thus anarchists are aware that the state is a tool for minority rule and only one source of evil.

Mitchinson, after misrepresenting anarchist thought, states:

*“Marxism, meanwhile, sees the division of society into classes, a minority who own the means of producing wealth, and the majority of us whose labour is the source of that wealth, as the crux of the matter. It is this class division of society which gives rise to the state — because the minority need a special force to maintain their rule over the majority — which has evolved over thousands of years into the complicated structures we see today.”*

Anarchists would agree, as far as this goes. Bakunin argued that the State “is authority, domination, and forced, organised by the property-owning and so-called enlightened classes against the masses.” He saw the social revolution as destroying capitalism and the state at the same time, that is “to overturn the State’s domination, and that of the privileged classes whom it solely represents.” [The Basic Bakunin, p. 140] The idea that the state is a means to ensure class rule is one anarchists, as can be seen, would agree with.

However, anarchists do not reduce their understanding of the state to this simplistic Marxist analysis. While being well aware that the state is the means of ensuring the domination of an economic elite, anarchists recognise that the state machine also has interests of its own. The state, for anarchists, is the delegation of power into the hands of a few. This creates, by its very nature, a privileged position for those at the top of the hierarchy:

*“A government, that is a group of people entrusted with making the laws and empowered to use the collective force to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class and cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put in a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of.”* [Malatesta, Anarchy, p. 34]

Thus, while it is true that the state (particularly under capitalism) acts as the agent of the capitalist class, it does not mean that it does not have interests of its own. The State has developed as a means of imposing minority rule — that much anarchists and Marxists can agree upon. To do so it has developed certain features, notably delegation of power into the hands of a few. This feature of the state is a product of its function. However, function and feature are inseparable — retain the feature and the function will be re-established. In other words, maintain the state and minority rule will be re-established.

The simplistic class analysis of the state has always caused Marxists problems, particularly Trotskyists who used it to deny the obvious class nature of Stalinist Russia. Rather than see the USSR as a class society in which the State bureaucracy exploited and oppressed the working class for its own benefits, Trotskyists argued it was an autocratic, privileged bureaucracy in a classless society. As anarchist Camillo Berneri argued:

*“In history there is no absurdity. An autocratic bureaucracy is a class, therefore it is not absurd that it should exist in a society where classes remain — the bureaucratic class and the proletarian class. If the USSR was a ‘classless’ society, it would also be a society without a bureaucratic autocracy, which is the natural fruit of the permanent existence of the State.”* [“The State and Classes”, Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review, no. 4, p. 49]

The weakness (or incompleteness) of the Marxist understanding of the state can best be seen by Trotsky's and his followers lack of understanding of Stalinism. As the state owned all the land and means of production, there could be no classes and so the Soviet Union must be a classless society. However, the obvious privileges of the bureaucracy could not be denied (as Trotsky was once a leading bureaucrat, he saw and experienced them at first hand). But as the state bureaucracy could not be a class and have class interests (by definition), Trotsky could not see the wood for the trees. The actual practice of Leninism in power is enough to expose its own theoretical weaknesses.

## 9. Why is Mitchinson wrong about the “*Abolition [i.e. Abolition] of the state*”?

Mitchinson moves on to argue that the “*modern capitalist state can wear many guises, monarchy, republic, dictatorship, but in the end its purpose remains the same, to maintain the minority rule of the capitalist class. Marxism's goal therefore is not simply to abolish the state, but to put an end to class society.*” Needless to say, that is also anarchism's goal. As Bakunin argued, “*political transformation ... [and] economic transformation ... must be accomplished together and simultaneously.*” [The Basic Bakunin, p. 106] So, as can be seen, anarchism's goal is not simply abolishing the state, but to put an end to class society. That anarchists have always argued the state and capitalism must be destroyed at the same time is easily discovered from reading their works.

Continuing this theme he argues that the state “*was born with the split of society into classes to defend private property. So long as there are classes there will be a state. So, how can class society be ended? Not by its denial, but only by the victory of one of the contending classes. Triumph for capitalism spells ruin for millions.*”

Of course, we could point out here that many anthropologists disagree with the claim that the state is a product of class society. As Michael Taylor summarises, the “*evidence does not give this proposition a great deal of support. Much of the evidence which has been offered in support of it shows only that the primary states, not long after their emergence, were economically stratified. But this is of course consistent also with the simultaneous rise ... of political and economic stratification, or with the prior development of the state — i.e. of political stratification — and the creation of economic stratification by the ruling class.*” [Community, Anarchy and Liberty, p. 132]

Also, of course, as should be obvious from what we have said previously, anarchists do not think class society can be ended by “denial.” As is clear from even a quick reading of any anarchist thinker, anarchists seek to end class society as well as the state. However, we reject as simplistic the Marxist notion that the state exists purely to defend classes. The state has certain properties **because it is a state** and one of these is that it creates a bureaucratic class around it due to its centralised, hierarchical nature. Within capitalism, the state bureaucracy is part of the ruling class and (generally) under the control of the capitalist class. However, to generalise from this specific case is wrong as the state bureaucracy is a class in itself — and so trying to abolish classes without abolishing the state is doomed to failure.



## 10. Why is Mitchinson's comment that we face either "*socialism or barbarism*" actually undermine his case?

Mitchinson continues:

*"As Marx once explained the choice before us is not socialism or the status quo, but socialism or barbarism."*

We should point out that it Rosa Luxemburg who is usually associated with this quote. She made her famous comment during the First World War. The start of this war saw the Marxist German Social Democratic Party (and a host of others) vote for war credits in Parliament. This party was a mass workers' party which aimed to use every means, including elections, to gain reforms for the working class. The net end result of this strategy was the voting for war credits and the support of their state and ruling class in the war — that is, the betrayal of the fundamental principles of socialism.

This event did not happen out of the blue. It was the end result of years of working within the bourgeois political system, of using elections ("*political activity*") as a means of struggle. The Social Democratic Parties had already been plagued with reformist elements for years. These elements, again, did not come from nowhere but were rather the response to what the party was actually doing. They desired to reform the party to bring its rhetoric in-line with its practice. As one of the most distinguished historians of this period put it, the "*distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference of ideas in the evaluation of reality rather than a difference in the realm of action.*" [C. Schorske, **German Social Democracy**, p. 38] The debacle of 1914 was a logical result of the means chosen, the evidence was already there for all to see (except, apparently, Lenin who praised the "*fundamentals of parliamentary tactics*" of the German and International Social Democracy and how they were "*at the same time implacable on questions of principle and always directed to the accomplishment of the final aim*" in his obituary of August Bebel in 1913! [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 248])

Needless to say, this result had been predicted by Bakunin over 40 years previously. And Mitchinson wants us to repeat this strategy? As Marx said, history repeats itself — first it is tragedy, second time it is farce.

## 11. Why is Mitchinson wrong to assert anarchists do not believe in defending a revolution?

Mitchinson argues that the "*victory of the working class can only mean the destruction of the capitalist state. Will the capitalists take defeat like sporting ladies and gentlemen, retiring quietly to the pavilion? No, all history suggests that they would not. The workers would need to create a new state, for the first time to defend the rule of the majority over the minority.*"

Yes, indeed, all history **does** show that a ruling class will not retire quietly and a revolution will need to defend itself. If anarchists **did** believe that they would retire peacefully then Marxists would be correct to attack us. However, Marxist assertions are false. Indeed, they must think anarchists are morons if they genuinely do think we do not believe in defending a revolution. A few quotes should suffice to expose these Marxist claims as lies:

*“Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades... [T]he federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction ... it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution.” [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 170–1]*

*“[L]et us suppose ... it is Paris that starts [the revolution] ... Paris will naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune... All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise the necessary common services ... and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution.” [Op. Cit., p. 178–9]*

Bakunin was well aware that revolution implied “civil war” — i.e. attempts by the ruling class to maintain its power (see, for example, his “Letters to a Frenchman” in **Bakunin on Anarchism**). As can be seen, Bakunin was well aware of the needs to defend a revolution after destroying the state and abolishing capitalism. Similarly we discover Malatesta arguing that we should “[a]rm all the population,” and the “creation of a voluntary militia, without powers to interfere as militia in the life of the community, but only to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution.” [**Life and Ideas**, p. 170 and p. 166] In Malatesta’s words:

*“But, by all means, let us admit that the governments of the still unemancipated countries were to want to, and could, attempt to reduce free people to a state of slavery once again. Would this people require a government to defend itself? To wage war men are needed who have all the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter. And the experience of history teaches us that a people who really want to defend their own country are invincible: and in Italy everyone knows that before the corps of volunteers (anarchist formations) thrones topple, and regular armies composed of conscripts or mercenaries disappear... [Some people] seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the **freedom** of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!” [Anarchy, pp. 40–1]*

Not only do we have this theoretical position, we can also point to concrete historical examples — the Makhnovist movement in the Russian Revolution and the CNT militias during the Spanish Revolution, among others — that prove that anarchists do recognise the need and importance of defending a successful revolution.

Therefore, statements asserting that anarchists are against defending a revolution are either spreading a conscious lie or a product of deep ignorance.

Thus the question is **not** one of defending or not defending a revolution. The question is **how** do we defend it (and, another key question, what **kind** of revolution do we aim for). Marxists

urge us to “create a new state, for the first time to defend the rule of the majority over the minority.” Anarchists reply that every state is based on the delegation of power into the hands of a minority and so cannot be used to defend the rule of the majority over the minority. Rather, it would be the rule of those who claim to represent the majority. The confusion between people power and party power is at the root of why Leninism is not revolutionary.

Mitchinson then quotes Lenin and Trotsky to defend his assertion:

*“The proletariat needs the state only temporarily. We do not at all disagree with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as the aim. We maintain that, to achieve this aim, we must temporarily make use of the instruments resources and methods of state power against the exploiters.”* [Lenin]

*“Marxists are wholly in agreement with the anarchists in regard to the final goal: the liquidation of the state. Marxists are statist only to the extent that one cannot achieve the liquidation of the state simply by ignoring it.”* [Trotsky]

Of course, quoting Lenin or Trotsky when they make a false assertion does not turn lies into truth. As proven above, anarchists are well aware of the necessity of overthrowing the state by revolution **and** defending that revolution against attempts to defeat it. To state otherwise is to misrepresent anarchist theory on this subject. Moreover, despite Trotsky’s claims, anarchists are aware that you do not destroy something by ignoring it. The real question is thus **not** whether to defend a revolution or whether to shatter the state machine. The questions are, **how** do you shatter the state, what do you replace existing society with and how do you defend a revolution. To state otherwise is to build a strawman — unfortunately much of Lenin’s “masterpiece” **The State and Revolution** is based on destroying this self-created strawman.

## 12. Would the “workers’ state” really be different, as Mitchinson claims?

Mitchinson argues that from “*the very beginning this would be like no previous state machine. From day one it would be in effect a semi-state.*” The question is, for anarchists, whether this “semi-state” is marked by the delegation of power into the hands of a government. If so, then the “semi-state” is no such thing — it is a state like any other and so an instrument of minority rule. Yes, this minority may state it represents the majority but in practice it can only represent itself and claim that is what the majority desires.

Hence, for anarchists, “*the essence of the state ... [is] centralised power or to put it another way the coercive authority of which the state enjoys the monopoly, in that organisation of violence know as ‘government’; in the hierarchical despotism, juridical, police and military despotism that imposes laws on everyone.*” [Luigi Fabbri, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 24–5] The so-called “semi-state” is nothing of the kind — it is a centralised power in which a few govern the many. Therefore, the “workers’ state” would be “workers” in name only.

Mitchinson continues:

*“The task of all previous revolutions was to seize state power. From the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 Marx and Engels concluded that it would not be possible for*

*the workers to simply use the old state apparatus, they would instead have to replace it with an entirely new one, to serve the interests of the majority and lay the basis for a socialist society.”*

Needless to say, he forgets the **key** question — **who** is to seize power. Is it the majority, directly, or a minority (the leaders of a party) who claim to represent the majority. Leninists are clear, it is to be the party, not the working class as a whole. They confuse party power with class power. In the words of Lenin:

*“The very presentation of the question — ‘dictatorship of the Party **or** dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders **or** dictatorship (Party) of the masses?’ — is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind ... [because] classes are usually ... led by political parties...”*

And:

*“To go so far in this matter as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid.”*  
[Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder, pp. 25–6 and p. 27]

However, what is **truly** stupid is confusing the rule by a minority with that of the majority managing their own affairs. The two things are different, they generate different social relationships and to confuse the two is to lay the ground work for the rule by a bureaucratic elite, a dictatorship of state officials **over** the working class.

Now we come to the usual Leninist claims about Bolshevik theory:

*“To ensure that the workers maintain control over this state, Lenin argued for the election of all officials who should be held accountable and subject to recall, and paid no more than the wage of a skilled worker. All bureaucratic tasks should be rotated. There should be no special armed force standing apart from the people, and we would add, all political parties except fascists should be allowed to organise.”*

This is what Lenin, essentially, said he desired in **The State and Revolution** (Mitchinson misses out one key aspect, to which we will return later). Anarchists reply in three ways.

Firstly, we note that *“much that passes for ‘Marxism’ in **State and Revolution** is pure anarchism — for example, the substitution of revolutionary militias for professional armed bodies and the substitution of organs of self-management for parliamentary bodies. What is authentically Marxist in Lenin’s pamphlet is the demand for ‘strict centralism,’ the acceptance of a ‘new’ bureaucracy, and the identification of soviets with a state.”* [Murray Bookchin, **Post-Scarcity Anarchism**, p. 213] As an example, let us look at the recall of “officials” (inspired by the Paris Commune). We find this in Bakunin’s and Proudhon’s work **before** it was applied by the Communards and praised by Marx. Bakunin in 1868 argued for a “Revolutionary Communal Council” composed of “delegates ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates.” [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, pp. 170–1] Proudhon’s election manifesto of 1848 argued for “universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the binding mandate. Politicians balk

*at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy.” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 63]* As can be seen, Lenin’s recommendations were first proposed by anarchists.

Thus the positive aspects of Lenin’s work are libertarian in nature, **not** Marxist as such. Indeed given how much time is spent on the Paris Commune (an essentially libertarian revolt obviously inspired by Proudhon’s ideas) his work is more libertarian than Marxist, as Bookchin makes clear. It is the non-libertarian aspects which helped to undermine the anarchist elements of the work.

Secondly, Lenin does not mention, never mind discuss, the role of the Bolshevik Party would have in the new “semi-state.” Indeed, the party is mentioned only in passing. That in itself indicates the weakness of using **The State and Revolution** as a guide book to Leninist theory or practice. Given the importance of the role of the party in Lenin’s previous and latter works, it suggests that to quote **The State and Revolution** as proof of Leninism’s democratic heart leaves much to be desired. And even **The State and Revolution**, in its one serious reference to the Party, is ambiguous in the extreme:

*“By educating the workers’ party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat which is capable of assuming power and of leading the whole people to Socialism, of directing and organising the new order, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie.” [The Essential Lenin, p. 288]*

Is it the vanguard **or** the proletariat which is “*capable of assuming power*”? The answer is important as a **social** revolution requires the fullest participation of the formerly oppressed masses in the management of their own affairs. In the context of the rest of **The State and Revolution** it could be argued it is the proletariat. However, this cannot be squared with Lenin’s (or Trotsky’s) post-October arguments and practices or the resolution of the Second World Congress of the Communist International which stated that “[e]very class struggle is a political struggle. The goal of this struggle ... is the conquest of political power. Political power cannot be seized, organised and operated except through a political party.” [cited by Duncan Hallas, **The Comintern**, p. 35] It is obvious that if the party rules, the working class does not. A socialist society cannot be built without the participation, self-activity and self-management of the working class. Thus the question of **who** makes decisions and **how** they do so is essential — if it is not the masses then the slide into bureaucracy is inevitable.

Thus to quote **The State and Revolution** proves nothing for anarchists — it does not discuss the key question of the party and so fails to present a clear picture of Leninist politics and their immediate aims. As soon becomes clear if you look at Leninism in power — i.e. what it actually did when it had the chance, to which we now turn.

Thirdly, we point to what he actually **did** in power. In this we follow Marx, who argued that we should judge people by what they do rather than what they say. We will concentrate on the pre-Civil War (October 1917 to May 1918) period to indicate that this breaking of promises started **before** the horrors of Civil War can be claimed to have forced these decisions onto the Bolsheviks.

Before the out-break of Civil War, the Bolsheviks had replaced election of “*all officials*” by appointment from above in many areas of life — for example, they abolished the election of

officers in the Red Army and replaced workers' self-management in production with one-man management, both forms of democracy being substituted by appointed from above. In addition, by the end of April, 1918, Lenin **himself** was arguing "[o]bedience, and unquestioning obedience at that, during work to the one-man decisions of Soviet directors, of the dictators elected **or appointed** by Soviet institutions, vested with dictatorial powers." [**Six Theses on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, p. 44 — our emphasis] Moreover, the Soviet Constitution stated that "[e]very commissar [of the Council of People's Commissars — i.e. the Soviet government] has a collegium (committee) of which he is the president, and the members of which are appointed by the Council of People's Commissars." Appointment was the rule at the very heights of the state. The "election of all officers" ("without exception" [Lenin, **The State and Revolution**, p. 302]) had ended by month six of the revolution even in Lenin's own writings — and **before** the start of the Civil War.

Lenin also argued in mid-April 1918 that the "socialist character of Soviet, i.e. **proletarian**, democracy" lies, in part, in "the people themselves determin[ing] the order and time of elections." [**The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government**, pp. 36–7] Given that "the government [had] continually postponed the new general elections to the Petrograd Soviet, the term of which had ended in March 1918" because it "feared that the opposition parties would show gains" Lenin's comments seem hypocritical in the extreme. [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, p. 22]

Moreover, the Bolsheviks did not stay true to Lenin's claim in **The State and Revolution** that "since the majority of the people **itself** suppresses its oppressors, a 'special force' is **no longer necessary**" as so "in place of a **special** repressive force, the whole population itself came on the scene." In this way the "state machine" would be "the armed masses of workers who become transformed into a universal people's militia." [Op. Cit., p. 301, p. 320 and p. 347] Instead they created a political police force (the Cheka) and a standing army (in which elections were set aside by decree). These were special, professional, armed forces standing apart from the people and unaccountable to them. Indeed, they were used to repress strikes and working class unrest. So much for Mitchinson's claim that "there should be no special armed force standing apart from the people" — it did not last three months (the Cheka was founded two months into the revolution, the Red Army was created in early 1918 and elections set aside by March of that year).

Lastly, the Bolsheviks banned newspapers from the start — including other socialist papers. In addition, they did not allow other political tendencies to organise freely. The repression started **before** the Civil War with the attack, by the Cheka, in April 1918 on the anarchist movements in Petrograd and Moscow. While repression obviously existed during the Civil War, it is significant that it, in fact, started **before** it began. During the Civil War, the Bolsheviks repressed all political parties, including the Mensheviks even though they "consistently pursued a policy of peaceable opposition to the Bolshevik regime, a policy conducted by strictly legitimate means" and "[i]ndividual Mensheviks who joined organisations aiming at the overthrow of the Soviet Government were expelled from the Menshevik Party." [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, pp. 318–9 and p. 332] In fact, repression **increased** after the end of the Civil War — a strange fact if it was that war which necessitated repression in the first place.

Moreover, Mitchinson fails to mention Lenin's argument that, like the Paris Commune, the workers' state would be based on a fusion of executive and administrative functions in the hands of the workers' delegates. This is hardly surprising, as Lenin created an executive body (the Council of People's Commissars) immediately after the October Revolution. This division of executive and administrative powers was written into the Soviet Constitution. So much for **The State and Revolution** — its promises did not last a night.

Thus, his claims that the “semi-state” would not be like any other state are contradicted by the actual experience of Bolshevism in power. For anarchists, this comes as no surprise as they are well aware that the state machine does not (indeed, **cannot**) represent the interests of the working classes due to its centralised, hierarchical and elitist nature — all it can do is represent the interests of the party in power, its own bureaucratic needs and privileges and slowly, but surely, remove itself from popular control. Hence the movement away from popular control — it is the nature of centralised power to remove itself from control from below, control by the masses, particularly when all other focal points of working class self-management have been abolished as being no longer required as we have a “semi-state.”

Mitchinson seems to want us to look purely at Bolshevik theory and not its practice. It is exactly what supporters of capitalism desire us to do — in theory, capitalism is based on free agreement and free exchange between autonomous individuals but in practice it is a system of inequality which violates the autonomy of individuals and makes a mockery of free agreement.

In a way, **The State and Revolution** laid out the foundations and sketched out the essential features of an alternative to Bolshevik power — as noted, that system would be essentially libertarian. Only the pro-Leninist tradition has used Lenin’s work, almost to quiet their conscience, because Lenin, once in power, ignored it totally. Such is the nature of the state — as Kropotkin and all other anarchists have argued, there can be no such thing as a “revolutionary government.” Conflict will inevitably arise between the party which aims to control the revolution and the actions of the masses themselves. To resolve the conflict the state must eliminate the organs of workers self-activity which the revolution creates otherwise the party cannot impose its decisions — and this is what the Bolshevik state did, aided of course by the horrors of the civil war.

To state the obvious, to quote theory and not relate it to the practice of those who claim to follow that theory is a joke. It is little more than sophistry. If you look at the actions of the Bolsheviks before and after the Russian Revolution you cannot help draw the conclusion that Lenin’s **State and Revolution** has nothing to do with Bolshevik policy and presents a false image of what Trotskyists desire.

### 13. Is the Marxist “worker’s state” really the rule of one class over another?

Mitchinson argues that the *“task of this state would be to develop the economy to eradicate want. Less need, means less need to govern society, less need for a state. Class society and the state will begin to wither away as the government of people, the rule of one class over another, is replaced by the administration of things, the planned use of resources to meet society’s needs.”*

As Malatesta makes clear, this is pure sophistry:

*“Whoever has power over things has power over men; whoever governs production also governs the producers; who determines consumption is master over the consumer.*

*“This is the question; either things are administered on the basis of free agreement of the interested parties, and this is anarchy; or they are administered according to laws made by administrators and this is government, it is the State, and inevitably it turns out to be tyrannical.*

*"It is not a question of the good intentions or the good will of this or that man, but of the inevitability of the situation, and of the tendencies which man generally develops in given circumstances."* [Life and Ideas, p. 145]

Moreover, it is debatable whether Trotskyists really desire the rule of one class over another in the sense of working class over capitalist class. To quote Trotsky:

*"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity. In the revolutionary vanguard, organised in a party, is crystallised the aspirations of the masses to obtain their freedom. Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power."*

*"In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard."* [Stalinism and Bolshevism]

Thus, rather than the working class as a whole seizing power, it is the "vanguard" which takes power — *"a revolutionary party, even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* [Ibid.] That is, of course, true — they are still organs of working class self-management (such as factory committees, workers councils, trade unions, soldier committees) through which working people can still exercise their sovereignty. Little wonder Trotsky abolished independent unions, decreed the end of soldier committees and urged one-man management and the militarisation of labour when in power. Such working class organs do conflict with the sovereign rule of the party and so have to be abolished.

After being in power four years, Trotsky was arguing that the *"Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy."* [quoted by Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 78]

This position follows naturally from Trotsky's comments that the party "crystallises" the "aspirations" of the masses. If the masses reject the party then, obviously, their "cultural level" has fallen and so the party has the right, nay the duty, to impose its dictatorship over them. Similarly, the destruction of organs of working class self-management can be justified because the vanguard has taken power — which is **exactly** what Trotsky argued.

With regards to the Red Army and its elected officers, he stated in March 1918 that *"the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice, abolished by decree"* because the Bolshevik Party held power or, as he put it, *"political power is in the hands of the same working class from whose ranks the Army is recruited."* Of course, power was actually held by the Bolshevik party, not the working class, but never fear:

*"Once we have established the Soviet regime, that is a system under which the government is headed by persons who have been directly elected by the Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies, there can be no antagonism between the government and the mass of the workers, just as there is no antagonism between the administration of the union and the general assembly of its members, and, therefore, there cannot be any grounds for fearing the **appointment** of members of the commanding staff by the organs of the Soviet Power."* [Work, Discipline, Order]



He made the same comments with regard the factory committees:

*"It would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy of the collective will of the workers [a euphemism for the Party — M.B.] and not at all in the form in which individual economic organisations are administered."* [quoted by Maurice Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 66]

This point is reiterated in his essay, "*Bolshevism and Stalinism*" (written in 1937) when he argued that:

*"Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [Trotsky, **Op. Cit.**, p. 18]

And, obviously, without party dictatorship the soviets would return to the "*mud*." In other words, the soviets are only important to attain party rule and if the two come into conflict then Trotskyism provides the rule of the party with an ideological justification to eliminate soviet democracy. Lenin's and Trotsky's politics allowed them to argue that if you let the proletariat have a say then the dictatorship of the proletariat could be in danger.

Thus, for Trotsky, the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" is independent of allowing the proletariat to manage their own affairs directly. However, without the means of manage their own affairs directly, control their own lives, the proletariat are placed into the position of passive electors, who vote for parties who rule for and over them, in their own name. Moreover, they face the constant danger of the "*vanguard*" nullifying even these decisions as "*temporary vacillations*." A fine liberation indeed.

Also, as libertarian socialist Maurice Brinton argues, none of the Bolshevik leaders "*saw the proletarian nature of the Russian regime as primarily and crucially dependent on the exercise of workers' power at the point of production (i.e. workers' management of production). It should have been obvious to them as Marxists that if the working class did not hold economic power, its 'political' power would at best be insecure and would in fact degenerate.*" [**Op. Cit.**, p. 42]

With direct working class sovereignty eroded by the Bolsheviks in the name of indirect, i.e. party, sovereignty it is hardly surprising that the dictatorship of the proletariat becomes the dictatorship **over** the proletariat as Bakunin predicted. With the elimination of functional democracy and self-management, indirect democracy would not be able to survive for long in the face of centralised, top-down decision making by the ruling party.

So hopeless was Trotsky's understanding of socialism and the nature of a working class social revolution that he even considered the Stalinist dictatorship to be an expression of the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*." He argued that the "*bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order to guard its social conquests with **its own** methods. The anatomy of society is determined by its economic relations. So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class.*" [**The Class Nature of the Soviet State**]

Just to stress the point, according to Trotsky, under Stalinism **the proletariat was the ruling class** and that Stalin's dictatorship eliminated what remained (and it was not much) of working class political influence in order "*to guard its social conquests*"! What social conquests could remain if the proletariat was under the heel of a totalitarian dictatorship? Just one, state ownership of property — precisely the means by which the (state) bureaucracy enforced its control over production and so the source of its economic power (and privileges). To state the obvious, if the working class does not **control** the property it is claimed to own then someone else does. The economic relationship thus generated is a hierarchical one, in which the working class is an oppressed class. Thus Trotsky identified the source of the bureaucracy's economic power with "socialism" — no wonder his analysis of Stalinism (and vision of socialism) proved so disastrous.

Trotsky argues that the "*liberal-anarchist thought closes its eyes to the fact that the Bolshevik revolution, with all its repressions, meant an upheaval of social relations in the interests of the masses, whereas Stalin's Thermidorian upheaval accompanies the reconstruction of Soviet society in the interest of a privileged minority.*" [Stalinism and Bolshevism] However, social relations are just that, **social** and so between individuals and classes — ownership of property cannot tell the whole story. What social relations did Bolshevism bring about?

As far as the wage labour social relationship goes (and do not forget that is the defining feature of capitalism), the Bolsheviks opposed workers' self-management in favour of, first, "*control*" over the capitalists and then one-man management. No change in social relationships there. Property relations did change in the sense that the state became the owner of capital rather than individual capitalists, but the **social** relationship workers experienced during the working day and within society was identical. The state bureaucrat replaced the capitalist.

As for politics, the Bolshevik revolution replaced government with government. Initially, it was an elected government and so it had the typical social relationships of representative government. Later, it became a one party dictatorship — a situation that did not change under Stalin. Thus the social relationships there, again, did not change. The Bolshevik Party became the head of the government. That is all. This event also saw the reconstruction of Soviet Society in the interest of a privileged minority — it is well known that the Communists gave themselves the best rations, best premises and so on.

Thus the Bolshevik revolution did **not** change the social relations people faced and so Trotsky's comments are wishful thinking. The "*interests of the masses*" could not, and were not, defended by the Bolshevik revolution as it did not change the relations of authority in a society — the social relationships people experienced remain unchanged. Perhaps that is why Lenin argued that the proletarian nature of the Russian regime was ensured by the nature of the ruling party? There could be no other basis for saying the Bolshevik state was a workers' state. After all, nationalised property without workers' self-management **does not change social relationships** it just changes who is telling the workers what to do.

The important point to note is that Trotsky argued that the proletariat could be a ruling class when it had **no** political influence, never mind democracy, when subject to a one-party state and bureaucratic dictatorship and when the social relations of the society were obviously capitalistic. No wonder he found it impossible to recognise that dictatorship by the party did not equal dictatorship by the proletariat.

Therefore, the claim that Trotskyists see the "*dictatorship of the proletariat*" as "*the rule of one class over another*" is, as can be seen, a joke. Rather they see it as the rule of the party over the rest of society, **including** the working class. Even when that party had become a bureaucratic

nightmare, murdering millions and sending hundreds of thousands to forced labour camps, Trotsky still argued that the “*working class*” was still the “*ruling class*.” Not only that, his political perspective allowed him to justify the suppression of workers’ democracy in the name of the “*rule*” of the workers. For this reason, anarchists feel that the real utopians are the Leninists who believe that party rule equals class rule and that centralised, hierarchical power in the hands of the few will not become a new form of class rule. History, we think, supports our politics on this issue (as in so many others).

Mitchinson argues that “*Anarchism’s utopian calls to abolish the state overnight demonstrates neither the understanding of what the state is, nor the programme of action necessary to achieve the goal it sets itself.*” However, as made clear, it is Marxism which is utopian, believing that rule by a party equals rule by a class and that a state machine can be utilised by the majority of the population. As Kropotkin argued, Anarchists “*maintain that the State organisation, having been the force to which minorities resorted for establishing and organising their power over the masses, cannot be the force which will serve to destroy these privileges.*” [Kropotkin’s *Revolutionary Pamphlets*, p. 170]

Luigi Fabbri sums up the difference well:

*“The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists ... as the foes of all organisation and all co-ordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only effective way to struggle and organise, for it has the active participation of all members of the collective unit, instead of their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders.”* [“Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism”, in *The Poverty of Statism*, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 27]

Mitchinson moves on to the usual Marxist slander that as “*a modern philosophy anarchism developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century alongside the explosive growth of capitalism and its state machine. It represented a rebellion by a section of the petty bourgeoisie at the loss of their position in society, driven to the wall by the growth of monopoly.*” We have refuted this assertion in another appendix (Reply to errors and distortions in David McNally’s pamphlet “Socialism from Below”) and so will not do so here.

## **14. Why do anarchists reject the Marxist notion of “conquest of power”?**

Mitchinson now decides to quote some anarchists to back up his spurious argument:

*“Their case was argued by Mikhail Bakunin and his supporters in the First International. At an anarchist conference in 1872 they argued ‘The aspirations of the proletariat can have no other aim than the creation of an absolutely free economic organisation and federation based on work and equality and wholly independent of any political government, and such an organisation can only come into being through the spontaneous*

*action of the proletariat itself...no political organisation can be anything but the organisation of rule in the interests of a class and to the detriment of the masses...the proletariat, should it seize power, would become a ruling, and exploiting, class..."*

To understand this passage it is necessary to place it in historical context. In 1872, the proletariat was a **minority** class within all nations **bar** the UK. In almost all nations, the majority of the working class were either artisans or peasants (hence the reference to "*the masses*"). To urge that the proletariat seize power meant to advocate the class rule of a **minority** of the working masses. Minority rule could be nothing else but the dictatorship of a minority over the majority (a dictatorship in the usual sense of the word), and dictatorships always become exploitative of the general population.

Thus Mitchinson's "analysis" is ahistoric and, fundamentally, unscientific and a mockery of materialism.

Moreover, anarchists like Bakunin also made clear that the Marxist notion of "*proletarian dictatorship*" did not even mean that the proletariat **as a whole** would exercise power. In his words:

*"What does it mean, 'the proletariat raised to a governing class?' Will the entire proletariat head the government? The Germans number about 40 million. Will all 40 million be members of the government? The entire nation will rule, but no one would be ruled. Then there will be no government, there will be no state; but if there is a state, there will also be those who are ruled, there will be slaves.*

*"In the Marxists' theory this dilemma is resolved in a simple fashion. By popular government they mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people. So-called popular representatives and rulers of the state elected by the entire nation on the basis of universal suffrage — the last word of the Marxists, as well as the democratic school — is a lie behind which the despotism of a ruling minority is concealed, a lie all the more dangerous in that it represents itself as the expression of a sham popular will.*

*"So ... it always comes down to the same dismal result: government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of **former** workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people." [Statism and Anarchy, p. 178]*

Thus anarchists reject the notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat for two reasons. Firstly, because it excluded the bulk of the working masses when it was first used by Marx and Engels. Secondly, because in practice it would mean the dictatorship of the party **over** the proletariat. Needless to say, Mitchinson does not mention these points.

Mitchinson argues that "[a]lthough this sounds radical enough it nonetheless amounts to a recipe for inaction and disaster." And quotes Trotsky to explain why:

*"To renounce the conquest of power is voluntarily to leave the power with those who wield it, the exploiters. The essence of every revolution consisted and consists in putting*

*a new class in power, thus enabling it to realise its own programme in life. It is impossible to wage war and to reject victory. It is impossible to lead the masses towards insurrection without preparing for the conquest of power.”*

For anarchists the question immediately is, “power to who”? As is clear from the writings of Lenin and Trotsky they see the “conquest of power” **not** in terms of “putting a new class in power” but, in fact, the **representatives** of that class, the vanguard party, into power. Anarchists, in contrast, argue that organs of working class self-management are the means of creating and defending a **social** revolution as it is the only means that the mass of people can actually run their own lives and any power over and above these organs means dictatorship **over** the working class, a new form of state and class power.

As Rudolf Rocker argues:

*“Let no one object that the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ cannot be compared to run of the mill dictatorship because it is the dictatorship of a class. Dictatorship of a class cannot exist as such, for it ends up, in the last analysis, as being the dictatorship of a given party which arrogates to itself the right to speak for that class. Thus, the liberal bourgeoisie, in their fight against despotism, used to speak in the name of the ‘people’...*

*“We already know that a revolution cannot be made with rosewater. And we know, too, that the owning classes will never yield up their privileges spontaneously. On the day of victorious revolution the workers will have to impose their will on the present owners of the soil, of the subsoil and of the means of production, which cannot be done — let us be clear on this — without the workers taking the capital of society into their own hands, and, above all, without their having demolished the authoritarian structure which is, and will continue to be, the fortress keeping the masses of the people under dominion. Such an action is, without doubt, an act of liberation; a proclamation of social justice; the very essence of social revolution, which has nothing in common with the utterly bourgeois principle of dictatorship.*

*“The fact that a large number of socialist parties have rallied to the idea of councils, which is the proper mark of libertarian socialist and revolutionary syndicalists, is a confession, recognition that the tack they have taken up until now has been the product of a falsification, a distortion, and that with the councils the labour movement must create for itself a single organ capable of carrying into effect the unmitigated socialism that the conscious proletariat longs for. On the other hand, it ought not to be forgotten that this abrupt conversion runs the risk of introducing many alien features into the councils concept, features, that is, with no relation to the original tasks of socialism, and which have to be eliminated because they pose a threat to the further development of the councils. These alien elements are able only to conceive things from the dictatorial viewpoint. It must be our task to face up to this risk and warn our class comrades against experiments which cannot bring the dawn of social emancipation any nearer — which indeed, to the contrary, positively postpone it.*

*“Consequently, our advice is as follows: Everything for the councils or soviets! No power above them! A slogan which at the same time will be that of the social revolutionary.”*  
[Anarchism and Sovietism]

Or, as the Bakunin influenced Jura Federation of the First International put it in 1874, *“the dictatorship that we want is one which the insurgent masses exercise directly, without intermediary of any committee or government.”* [quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 631] In other words, a situation in which the working masses defend their freedom, their control over their own lives, from those who seek to replace it with minority rule.

## 15. What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?

Mitchinson argues that:

*“Anarchists see in the degeneration of the Soviet Union into a totalitarian dictatorship proof that Bakunin was right. In reality, only Leon Trotsky and Marxism have been able to explain the causes of that degeneration, finding its roots not in men’s heads or personalities, but in the real life conditions of civil war, armies of foreign intervention, and the defeat of revolution in Europe.”*

Needless to say, anarchism explains the causes of the degeneration in a far more rich way than Mitchinson claims. The underlying assumption of his “critique” of anarchism is that the **politics** of the Bolsheviks had no influence on the outcome of the revolution — it was a product purely of objective forces. He also subscribes to the contradictory idea that Bolshevik politics were essential for the success of that revolution. The facts of the matter is that people are faced with choices, choices that arise from the objective conditions that they face. What decisions they make will be influenced by the ideas they hold — they will **not** occur automatically, as if people were on auto-pilot — and their ideas are shaped by the social relationships they experience. Thus, someone placed into a position of power over others will act in certain ways, have a certain world view, which would be alien to someone subject to egalitarian social relations.

So, obviously the *“ideas in people’s heads”* matter, particularly during a revolution. Someone in favour of centralisation, centralised power and who equates party rule with class rule (like Lenin and Trotsky), will act in ways (and create structures) totally different from someone who believes in decentralisation and federalism. In other words, **political ideas do matter** in society. Nor do anarchists leave our analysis at this obvious fact — as noted, we also argue that the types of organisation people create and work in shapes the way they think and act. This is because specific kinds of organisation have specific authority relations and so generate specific social relationships. These obviously affect those subject to them — a centralised, hierarchical system will create authoritarian social relationships which shape those within it in totally different ways than a decentralised, egalitarian system. That Mitchinson denies this obvious fact suggests he knows nothing of materialist philosophy.

Moreover, anarchists are aware of the problems facing the revolution. After all, anarchists were involved in that revolution and wrote some of the best works on that revolution (for example, Voline’s **The Unknown Revolution**, Arshinov’s **The History of the Makhnovist Movement** and Maximov’s **The Guillotine at Work**). However, they point to the obvious fact that the politics of the Bolsheviks played a key role in how the revolution developed. While the terrible objective conditions may have shaped certain aspects of the actions of the Bolsheviks it cannot be denied that the impulse for them were rooted in Bolshevik theory. After all, anarchist theory could not

justify the suppression of the functional democracy associated with the factory committees or the soldiers election of officers in the Red Army. Bolshevik theory could, and did.

Indeed, Trotsky was still claiming in 1937 that the “*Bolshevik party achieved in the civil war the correct combination of military art and Marxist politics.*” [Stalinism and Bolshevism] In other words, the Bolshevik policies implemented during the Civil War were the correct, Marxist, ones. Also, although Lenin described the NEP (New Economic Policy) of 1921 as a ‘defeat’, at no stage did he describe the suppression of soviet democracy and workers’ control in such language. In other words, Bolshevik politics did play a role, a key role, in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and to deny it is to deny reality. In the words of Maurice Brinton:

*“[I]n relation to industrial policy there is a clear-cut and incontrovertible link between what happened under Lenin and Trotsky and the later practice of Stalinism. We know that many on the revolutionary left will find this statement hard to swallow. We are convinced however that any honest reading of the facts cannot but lead to this conclusion. The more one unearths about this period [1917–21], the more difficult it becomes to define — or even see — the ‘gulf’ allegedly separating what happened in Lenin’s time from what happened later. Real knowledge of the facts also makes it impossible to accept ... that the whole course of events was ‘historically inevitable’ and ‘objectively determined.’ Bolshevik ideology and practice were **themselves** important and sometimes decisive factors in the equation, at every critical stage of this critical period.” [Op. Cit., p. 84]*

We should also point out that far from “*Leon Trotsky and Marxism*” explaining the degeneration of the Russian revolution, Trotsky could not understand that a “*totalitarian dictatorship*” could be an expression of a new minority class and presented a decidedly false analysis of the Soviet Union as a “*degenerated workers’ state.*” That analysis led numerous Trotskyists to support these dictatorships and oppose workers’ revolts against them. In addition, Trotsky’s own reservations were only really voiced after he had lost power. Moreover, he never acknowledged how his own policies (such as the elimination of soldiers democracy, the militarisation of labour, etc.) played a key role in the rise of the bureaucracy and Stalin.

Ultimately, every explanation of the degeneration of the Russian revolution by Trotskyists ends up as an appeal to “*exception circumstances*” — they blame the rise of Stalinism on the Civil War, to the “*exceptional circumstances*” created by that war. This can be faulted for two reasons.

Firstly, as Trotsky himself argued (with respect to the Spanish Anarchists) “*did not the leaders of German social democracy invoke, in their time, the same excuse? Naturally, civil war is not a peaceful and ordinary but an ‘exceptional circumstance.’ ... we do severely blame the anarchist theory, which seemed wholly suitable for times of peace, but had to be dropped rapidly as soon as the ‘exceptional circumstance’ of the ... revolution had begun.*” [Stalinism and Bolshevism] Needless to say, he did not apply his critique to his own politics, which were also a form of the “*exceptional circumstances*” excuse. Given how quickly Bolshevik “principles” (as expressed in **The State and Revolution**) were dropped, we can only assume that Bolshevik ideas are also suitable purely for “*times of peace*” as well.

Secondly, this “explanation” basically argues that, if the bourgeois did not defend their power in 1917, then Leninism would have worked out fine. As Mitchinson himself noted above, belief that the bourgeois will just go away without a fight is “*an infantile flight of fancy.*” As Lenin argued, “*revolution ..., in its development, would give rise to exceptionally complicated circumstances*”

and “[r]evolution is the sharpest, most furious, desperate class war and civil war. Not a single great revolution in history has escaped civil war. No one who does not live in a shell could imagine that civil war is conceivable without exceptionally complicated circumstances.” [Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?, p. 80 and p. 81]

If the Civil War did solely produce the degeneration of the Russian Revolution then all we can hope for is that in the next social revolution, the civil war Lenin argued was inevitable is not as destructive as the Russian one. Hope is not much of a basis to build a “scientific” socialism — but then again, neither is “fate” much of a basis to explain the degeneration of the Russian Revolution but that is what Trotskyists do argue.

We discuss the Russian Revolution in more detail in the appendix on “What happened during the Russian Revolution?” of the FAQ and will not do so here. However, we can point out the experience of the anarchist Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine during the Russian Revolution. Facing exactly the same objective conditions they encouraged soviet democracy, held regular congresses of workers and peasants (the Bolsheviks tried to ban two of them), defended freedom of the press and of association and so on. If objective conditions determined Bolshevik policies, why did they not also determine the policies of the Makhnovists? This practical example indicates that the usual Trotskyist explanation of the degeneration of the Revolution is false.

Perhaps it is because of this, that it showed an alternative to Bolshevik politics existed and worked, that Trotskyists slander it? Trotsky himself asserted that the Makhnovists were simply “kulaks” on horseback and that Makhno’s “followers ... [expressed] a militant anti-Semitism.” [Lenin and Trotsky, *Kronstadt*, p. 80] We discuss the Makhnovist movement in the appendix on “Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism?” of the FAQ and there we refute claims that the Makhnovist movement was a kulak (rich peasant) one. However, the charge of “militant anti-Semitism” is a serious one and so we will expose its falsehood here and well as in section 9 of the specified appendix.

The best source to refute claims of anti-Semitism is to quote the work of the Jewish anarchist Voline. He summarises the extensive evidence against such claims:

*“We could cover dozens of pages with extensive and irrefutable proofs of the falseness of these assertions. We could mention articles and proclamations by Makhno and the Council of Revolutionary Insurgents denouncing anti-Semitism. We could tell of spontaneous acts by Makhno himself and other insurgents against the slightest manifestation of the anti-Semitic spirit on the part of a few isolated and misguided unfortunates in the army and the population... One of the reasons for the execution of Grigoriev by the Makhnovists was his anti-Semitism and the immense pogrom he organised at Elizabethgrad... We could cite a whole series of similar facts, but we do not find it necessary ... and will content ourselves with mentioning briefly the following essential facts:*

*“1. A fairly important part in the Makhnovist movement was played by revolutionists of Jewish origin.*

*“2. Several members of the Education and Propaganda Commission were Jewish.*

*“3. Besides many Jewish combatants in various units of the army, there was a battery composed entirely of Jewish artillery men and a Jewish infantry unit.*

*“4. Jewish colonies in the Ukraine furnished many volunteers to the Insurrectionary Army.*



*“5. In general the Jewish population ... took an active part in all the activities of the movement. The Jewish agricultural colonies ... participated in the regional assemblies of workers, peasants and partisans; they sent their delegates to the regional Revolutionary Military Council...” [The Unknown Revolution, pp. 967–8]*

Voline also quotes the eminent Jewish writer and historian M. Tcherikover about the question of the Makhnovists and anti-Semitism. The Jewish historian states *“with certainty that, on the whole, the behaviour of Makhno’s army cannot be compared with that of the other armies which were operating in Russian during the events 1917–21 ... It is undeniable that, of all these armies, including the Red Army, the Makhnovists behaved best with regard the civil population in general and the Jewish population in particular ... The proportion of **justified** complaints against the Makhnovist army, in comparison with the others, is negligible... Do not speak of pogroms alleged to have been organised by Makhno himself. That is a slander or an error. Nothing of the sort occurred. As for the Makhnovist Army ... [n]ot once have I been able to prove the existence of a Makhnovist unit at the place a pogrom against the Jews took place. Consequently, the pogroms in question could not have been the work of the Makhnovists.”* [quoted by Voline, *Op. Cit.*, p. 699]

Given that the Red Army agreed to two pacts with the Makhnovists, we can only surmise, if Trotsky thought he was telling the truth, that Trotsky was a hypocrite. However, Trotsky was either consciously lying or in error — unfortunately the Trotskyist publishers of his words did not bother to note that his assertion was false. We are sorry for this slight digression, but many Trotskyists take Trotsky’s words at face value and repeat his slander — unless we indicate their false nature they may not take our argument seriously.

Mitchinson continues by stating:

*“The position of anarchism only serves to endorse the bourgeois slander that Stalinism was inherent in Bolshevism.”*

This appeal against slander is ironic from someone who writes an article full of it. But, of course, it is **bourgeois** slander that he objects too — Trotskyist slander (and falsification) is fine.

The question of whether it is a *“bourgeois slander”* to argue (with supporting evidence) that *“Stalinism was inherent in Bolshevism”* is an important one. Trotskyists often point out that anarchist and libertarian Marxist critiques of Bolshevism sound similar to bourgeois ones and that anarchist accounts of Bolshevik crimes against the revolution and working class give ammunition to the defenders of the status quo. However, this seems more like an attempt to stop critical analysis of the Russian Revolution than a serious political position. Yes, the bourgeois do argue that Stalinism was inherent in Bolshevism — however they do so to discredit all forms of socialism and radical social change. Anarchists, on the other hand, analyse the revolution, see how the Bolsheviks acted and draw conclusions from the facts in order to push forward revolutionary thought, tactics and ideas. Just because the conclusions are similar does not mean that they are invalid — to label criticism of Bolshevism as *“bourgeois slander”* is nothing less than attempt to put people off investigating the Russian Revolution.

There are of course essential differences between the *“bourgeois slanders”* against the Bolsheviks and the anarchist critique. The bourgeois slander is based on an opposition to the revolution **as such** while the anarchist critique affirms it. The bourgeois slanders are not the result of the experiences of the working masses and revolutionaries subject to the Bolshevik regime as the

anarchist is. Similarly, the bourgeois slanders ignore the nature of capitalist society while the anarchist critique points out that the degeneration of the Bolshevik state and party were a result of it not breaking with bourgeois ideas and organisational structures. Ultimately, it is **not** a case of “*bourgeois slanders*” but rather an honest evaluation of the events of the Russian Revolution from a working class perspective.

To use an analogy, it is common place for the bourgeois press and ideologists to attack trade unions as being bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of their members. It is also common place for members of those same trade unions to think exactly the same. Indeed, it is a common refrain of Trotskyists that the trade unions **are** bureaucratic and need to be reformed in a more democratic fashion (indeed, Mitchinson calls for the unions to be “*transformed*” in his essay). Needless to say, the bourgeois comments are “correct” in the sense that the trade unions do have a bureaucracy — their reasons for stating that truth serve their interests and their solutions aid those interests and not those of the members of the unions. Could a Trotskyist say that it was a “*bourgeois slander*” if the capitalist press point to the bureaucratic nature of the unions when their own papers do the same?

While it may be in the interests of the ruling elite and its apologists to scream about “*bourgeois slanders*”, it hinders the process of working class self-emancipation to do so. As intended, in all likelihood.

## 16. Did anarchists reject “*the need for organisation in the shape of trade unions*”?

Mitchinson now decides to “expose” anarchism:

*“In its early days, this modern anarchism found a certain support amongst the workers. However, through the course of struggle workers learned the need for organisation in the shape of the trade unions, and also for political organisation which led to the building of the mass workers parties.”*

To see the total nonsense of this claim we need only to turn to Marx. In his words, Bakunin thought that the “*working class ... must only organise themselves by trades-unions.*” [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, p. 48] Bakunin himself argued “*the natural organisation of the masses ... is organisation based on the various ways that their various types of work define their day-to-day life; it is organisation by trade association.*” [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 139] Kropotkin argued that the “*union [syndicat] is absolutely necessary. It is the only form of workers’ grouping which permits the direct struggle to be maintained against capital without falling into parliamentarism.*” [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 269]

So much for anarchism being against trade unions (as Mitchinson implies). As for mass workers parties, well, history proved Bakunin right — such parties became corrupted, bureaucratic and reformist. For Mitchinson the last 130 years have not existed.

He goes on to argue that “*Bakunin and co. denounced participation in parliament, or the fight for reforms as a betrayal of the revolution, they ‘rejected all political action not having as its immediate and direct objective the triumph of the workers over capitalism, and as a consequence, the abolition of the state.’*”

We must first note that the Bakunin quote presented does not support Mitchinson's assertions — unless you think that reforms can only be won via participation in parliament (something anarchists reject). The reason **why** Bakunin rejected "*all political action*" (i.e. bourgeois politics — electioneering in other words) is not explained. We will now do so.

Bakunin did denounce participation in parliament. History proved him right. Participation in parliament ensured the corruption of the Social Democratic Parties, the Greens and a host of other radical and socialist organisations. Mitchinson seems to have forgotten the fights against reformism that continually occurred in the Social Democratic Parties at end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries, a fight which ended with the defeat of the revolutionary wing and the decision to support the nation state in the first world war. The actual experience of using parliament confirmed Bakunin's prediction that when "*the workers ... send common workers ... to Legislative Assemblies ... The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois ... For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them.*" [The Basic Bakunin, p. 108]

What is not true, however, is that claim that Bakunin thought that "*the fight for reforms [w]as a betrayal of the revolution.*" Bakunin was a firm believer in the importance of struggles for reforms, but struggles of a specific kind — namely struggles to win reforms which are based on the **direct action** by workers themselves:

*"What policy should the International [Workers' Association] follow during th[e] somewhat extended time period that separates us from this terrible social revolution ... the International will give labour unrest in all countries an **essentially economic** character, with the aim of reducing working hours and increasing salary, by means of the **association of the working masses** ... It will [also] propagandise its principles ... [Op. Cit., p. 109]*

*"And indeed, as soon as a worker believes that the economic state of affairs can be radically transformed in the near future, he begins to fight, in association with his comrades, for the reduction of his working hours and for an increase in his salary... through practice and action ... the progressive expansion and development of the economic struggle will bring him more and more to recognise his true enemies: the privileged classes, including the clergy, the bourgeois, and the nobility; and the State, which exists only to safeguard all the privileges of those classes." [Op. Cit., p. 103]*

This argument for reforms by direct action and workers' associations was a basic point of agreement in those sections of the First International which supported Bakunin's ideas. In the words of an anarchist member of the Jura Federation writing in 1875:

*"Instead of begging the State for a law compelling employers to make them work only so many hours, the trade associations **directly impose** this reform on the employers; in this way, instead of a legal text which remains a dead letter, a real economic change is effected **by the direct initiative of the workers** ... if the workers devoted all their activity and energy to the organisation of their trades into societies of resistance, trade federations, local and regional, if, by meetings, lectures, study circles, papers and pamphlets, they kept up a permanent socialist and revolutionary agitation; if by linking*

*practice to theory, they **realised directly**, without any bourgeois and governmental intervention, all immediately possible reforms, reforms advantageous not to a few workers but to the labouring mass — certainly then the cause of labour would be better served than ... legal agitation.*” [quoted by Caroline Cahm, **Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism**, p. 226]

So much for Bakunin or the libertarian wing of the First International being against reforms or the struggle for reforms. Anarchists have not changed their minds on this issue.

## 17. Why do anarchists reject political activity?

After spreading falsehoods against Bakunin, Mitchinson states that:

*“Marxism fights for the conquest of political power by the working class and the building of a socialist society, under which the state will wither away.*

*“Until then should workers refrain from political activity? Should they reject all reforms that might improve their existence? Nothing would please Blair or the bosses more.”*

It is ironic that Mitchinson mentions Blair. He is, after all, the leader of the Labour Party — as mass workers party formed from the trade unions to use political action to gain reforms within capitalism. The current state of Labour indicates well the comment that *“in proportion as the socialists become a power in the present bourgeois society and State, their socialism must die out.”* [Kropotkin, **Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets**, p. 189] It is as if the history of Social Democracy (or even the German Greens) does not exist for Mitchinson — he points to Blair to refute anarchist analysis that Parliamentary politics corrupts the parties that use it! How strange, to ignore the results of socialists actually using *“political activity”* (and we must stress that anarchists traditionally use the term *“political action”* to refer to electioneering, i.e. bourgeois politics, only). Obviously reality is something which can be ignored when creating a political theory.

Needless to say, as noted above, anarchists do not *“reject all reforms.”* We have quoted Bakunin, now we quote Kropotkin — *“the Anarchists have always advised taking an active part in those workers’ organisations which carry on the **direct** struggle of Labour against Capital and its protector, the State.”* He continued by arguing that such struggle, *“better than any other indirect means, permits the worker to obtain some temporary improvements in the present conditions of work, while it opens his eyes to the evil done by Capitalism and the State that supports it, and wakes up his thoughts concerning the possibility of organising consumption, production, and exchange without the intervention of the capitalist and the State.”* [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 82–3]

Thus we do not think that political action (electioneering) equates to reforms nor even is the best means of winning reforms in the first place. Anarchists argue that by direct action we can win reforms.

Mitchinson continues his diatribe:

*“Of course not, we must advocate the struggle for every gain no matter how minor, and use any and every field open to us. Only the dilettante can reject better wages or a health care system. Precisely through these struggles, and the struggles to transform the workers organisations the unions and the parties, we learn and become more powerful and bring closer the day when it will be possible to transform society for good.”*

As noted, anarchists do not reject reforms. Only a dilettante misrepresents the position of his enemies. And, as can be seen from the above quotes by Bakunin and Kropotkin, anarchists agree with Mitchinson's comments. Anarchists agree on the need to win reforms by direct action, which necessitates the creation of new forms of working class organisation based on firm libertarian principles and tactics — organisations like workers' councils, factory committees, community assemblies and so on.

However, when looking at the fields of struggle open to us, we evaluate them based on a materialist basis — looking at the implications of the tactics in theory and how they **actually worked out in practice**. Mitchinson obviously refuses to do this. Anarchists, on the other hand, base their politics on such an evaluation. For example, Bakunin would have been aware of Proudhon's experiences in the French National Assembly during the 1848 revolution:

*"As soon as I set foot in the parliamentary Sinai, I ceased to be in touch with the masses; because I was absorbed by my legislative work, I entirely lost sight of current events ... One must have lived in that isolator which is called the National Assembly to realise how the men who are most completely ignorant of the state of the country are almost always those who represent it ... fear of the people is the sickness of all those who belong to authority; the people, for those in power, are the enemy."* [Proudhon, quoted by Peter Marshall, **Demanding the Impossible**, p. 244]

Similarly, the practical experiences of a socialist elected into Parliament would be easy to predict — they would be swamped by bourgeois politics, issues and activities. Anarchism gained such socialists elected to parliament as Johann Most and Ferdinand Nieuwenhuis who soon released the correctness of the anarchist analysis. Thus actual experience confirmed the soundness of anarchist politics. Mitchinson, on the other hand, has to deny history — indeed, he fails to mention the history of Social Democracy at all in his article.

Thus the claim that we should use "*every field open to us*" is idealistic nonsense, at total odds with any claim to use scientific techniques of analysis (i.e. to being a scientific socialist) or a supporter of materialist philosophy. It means the rejection of historical analysis and the embrace of ahistoric wishful thinking.

Moreover, why do the workers need to "*transform*" their own organisations in the first place? Perhaps because they are bureaucratic organisations in which power is centralised at the top, in a few hands? Why did this happen, if fighting for reforms by any suitable means (including electioneering) was their rationale? Perhaps because the wrong people are in positions of power? But why are they the wrong people? Because they are right-wing, have reformist ideas, etc. Why do they have reformist ideas? Here Mitchinson must fall silent, because obviously they have reformist ideas because the organisations and activities they are part of are reformist through and through. The tactics (using elections) and organisational structure (centralisation of power) bred such ideas — as Bakunin and other anarchists predicted. Mitchinson's politics cannot explain why this occurs, which explains why Lenin was so surprised when German Social Democracy supported its ruling class during the First World War.

## 18. How do anarchists struggle for reforms under capitalism?

Mitchinson continues his distortion of anarchism by arguing:

*“Marxists fight for every reform, whilst at the same time explaining that while capitalism continues none of these advances are safe. Only socialism can really solve the problems of society.”*

As noted above, anarchists also fight for every reform possible — but by direct action, by the strength of working people in their “*natural organisations*” and “*social power*” (to use Bakunin’s words). We also argue that reforms are always in danger — that is why we need to have strong, direct action based organisations and self-reliance. If we leave it to leaders to protect (never mind **win** reforms) we would not have them for long. Given that Labour governments have whittled previous reforms just as much as Conservative ones, anarchists feel our strategy is the relevant one.

Mitchinson continues:

*“Our modern day anarchists, Reclaim the Streets and others, have no support in Britain amongst the organised workers.”*

Which is not true, as RTS and other anarchists do seek influence with the organised workers (and the unorganised ones, and the unemployed, etc.). They have invited rank-and-file trade union activists to their demonstrations to speak, trade unionists are members of anarchist organisations, etc. Anarchists are at the forefront of supporting strikers, particularly when their union betrays their struggle and does not support them. For example, during the Liverpool dockers strike RTS and the dockers formed a common front, organised common demonstrations and so on. The trade unions did nothing to support the dockers, RTS and other anarchist groups did. That in itself indicates the weakness of Mitchinson’s claims. It would also be useful to point out that Trotskyists have little support amongst organised workers as well.

Moreover, anarchists do not seek to become part of the trade union bureaucracy and so their influence cannot be easily gauged.

After asserting these dubious “facts” about anarchist influence, he continues:

*“Some radicalised youth however are attracted to their ‘direct action’ stance. There is a vacuum left by the absence of a mass Labour youth organisation which, fighting for a socialist programme, could attract these young workers and students. With no lead being given by the tops of the unions, and Labour in government attacking young people, that vacuum can be temporarily and partly filled by groups like Reclaim the Streets.”*

Needless to say, Mitchinson does not pose the question **why** the Labour government is attacking “*young people*” (and numerous other sections of the working class). Why has the Labour Party, a mass workers party which uses elections to gain reforms, been attacking (as it has always done, we must note) its support? If its because the leaders are “right-wing” then why have the membership supported them? Why have the “right-wing” gained such influence? Also, why is there no “*mass Labour youth organisation*”? And why should “*young people*” join an organisation which is part of the party which is attacking them? And why are the “*tops of the unions*” not giving a “*lead*”? Perhaps because its not in their interests to do so? Because they hate direct action and radical workers as much as the bosses?

Mitchinson’s “analysis” is question begging in the extreme.

He continues:

*“What action do they propose though? In their press statement (2/5/00) they explain, ‘We were not protesting. Under the shadow of an irrelevant parliament we were planting the seeds of a society where ordinary people are in control of their land, their resources, their food and their decision making. The garden symbolised an urge to be self-reliant rather than dependent on capitalism.’”*

Firstly, we should point out that having access to land is a key way for workers to be independent of capitalism. Perhaps Mitchinson forgets Marx’s discussion of the colonies in chapter 33 of **Capital**? In it Marx discusses how access to land allowed immigrants to America and Australia to reject wage labour (i.e. capitalism) by providing them with the means to survive without selling themselves on the labour market to survive. The state had to be used to enforce the laws of supply and demand by restricting access to the land. Or, perhaps, he had forgotten Marx’s discussion in chapter 27 of **Capital** of the role of enclosures in creating a dispossessed mass of people who were forced, by necessity, to become the first generation of wage slaves? Either way, access to the land **was** (and still is, in many countries) a means of being independent of capitalism — and one which the state acts to destroy.

Secondly, the garden was a **symbol** of a communist society, not an expression of the type of society RTS and other anarchists desire. So, as a **symbol** of an anti-capitalist vision, the garden is a good one given the history of state violence used to separate working people from the land and propel them into the labour market. However, it is only a **symbol** and not, obviously, to be taken as an example of the future society RTS or other anarchists desire. Only someone lacking in imagination could confuse a symbol with a vision — as the press release states it *“celebrated the possibility of a world that encourages co-operation and sharing rather than one which rewards greed, individualism and competition.”*

Thirdly, as their press release states, *“Guerrilla Gardening is not a protest; by its very nature it is a creative peaceful celebration of the growing global anticapitalist movement.”* Mitchinson attacks the action for being something it was never intended to be.

He “analyses” the RTS press release:

*“The fact that parliament appears powerless to prevent job losses or the destruction of the environment, only demonstrates that it serves the interests of capitalism.”*

Very true, as Kropotkin argued the *“State is there to protect exploitation, speculation and private property; it is itself the by-product of the rapine of the people. The proletariat must rely on his own hands; he can expect nothing of the State. It is nothing more than an organisation devised to hinder emancipation at all costs.”* [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 27] He argues elsewhere that *“small groups of men [and women] were imbued with the ... spirit of revolt. They also rebelled — sometimes with the hope of partial success; for example winning a strike and of obtaining bread for their children ... Without the menace contained in such revolts, no serious concession has ever been wrung by the people from governing classes.”* [**Evolution and Environment**, p. 103]

Mitchinson seems to agree:

*“However, under pressure from below it is possible to introduce reforms through parliament that are in the interests of ordinary people.”*

Thus reforms are possible, but only if we rely on ourselves, organise pressure from below and use direct action to force parliament to act (if that is required). Which is what anarchists have always argued. Without anti-parliamentary action, parliament will ignore the population. That is what anarchists have always argued — we have to rely on our own organisations, solidarity and direct action to change things for the better. Faced with such a movement, parliament would introduce reforms regardless of who was a member of it. Without such a movement, you end up with Tony Blair. Thus Mitchinson is confused — by his own logic, the anarchists are correct, we have to work outside parliament and electioneering in order to be effective.

He continues:

*“It is no use declaring parliament to be irrelevant, and turning your back on it when the majority do not agree, and still look to government to make their lives better. This is the mirror image of the sects attitude to the Labour Party. Any and every avenue which can be used to improve our lives must be used.”*

How do you change the opinion of the majority? By changing your position to match theirs? Of course not. You change their position by argument and proving that direct action is more effective in making their lives better than looking to government. Mitchinson would have a fit if someone argued *“it is no use declaring capitalism to be wrong and fighting against it when the majority do not agree and still look to it to make their lives better.”* If the majority do not agree with you, then you try and change their opinion — you do not accept that opinion and hope it goes away by itself!

Mitchinson seems to be following Lenin when he argued *“[y]ou must not sink to the level of the masses ... You must tell them the bitter truth. You are duty bound to call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices what they are — prejudices. But at the same time you must soberly follow the actual state of the class-consciousness ... of all the toiling masses.”* [Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder, p. 41] Obviously, you cannot tell workers the bitter truth and at the same time follow their prejudices. In practice, if you follow their prejudices you cannot help but encourage faith in parliament, social democratic parties, leaders and so on. Progress is achieved by discussing issues with people, not ducking the question of political issues in favour of saying what the majority want to hear (which is what the capitalist media and education system encourage them to believe in the first place). As a means of encouraging revolutionary thought it is doomed to failure.

Also, just to stress the point, any and every avenue which can be used to improve our lives must be used but only if it actually is revolutionary and does not place obstacles in the process of social change. Parliamentary action has been proven time and time again to be a false way for radical change — it only ends up turning radicals into supporters of the status quo. It makes as much sense as arguing that any and every avenue must be used to cure a disease, including those which give you a new disease in its place.

## 19. How does Mitchinson distort the use of the term “Self-reliance”?

Mitchinson argues that:

*“In any case this ‘self-reliance’ is no alternative. Self-reliance won’t get electricity into your house, educate your children or treat you when you are ill.”*



No anarchist and no one in RTS ever claimed it would. We use the term “*self-reliance*” in a totally different way — as anyone familiar with anarchist or RTS theory would know. We use it to describe individuals who think for themselves, question authority, act for themselves and do not follow leaders. No anarchist uses the term to describe some sort of peasant life-style. But then why let facts get in the way of a nice diatribe?

He continues:

*“We have the resources to cater for all of society’s needs, the only problem is that we do not own them.”*

Actually, the **real** problem is that we do not **control** them. The examples of Nationalised industries and the Soviet Union should make this clear. In theory, they were both owned by their populations but, in practice, they were effectively owned by those who managed them — state bureaucrats and managers. They were not used to cater for our needs, but rather the needs of those who controlled them. For this reason anarchists argue that common ownership without workers’ self-management in the workplace and community would be little more than state capitalism (wage labour would still exist, but the state would replace the boss).

He continues with his distortion of the concept of “*self-reliance*”:

*“Individualism (self-reliance) cannot be an alternative to socialism, where all the resources of society are at all of our disposal, and equally we all contribute what we can to society.”*

Firstly, anarchists are socialists and mostly seek a (libertarian) communist society where the resources of the world are at our disposal.

Secondly, self-reliance has little to do with “*individualism*” — it has a lot to do with **individuality**, however. The difference is important.

Thirdly, in a part of the press release strangely unquoted by Mitchinson, RTS argue that their action “*celebrated the possibility of a world that encourages co-operation and sharing rather than one which rewards greed, individualism and competition.*” RTS are well aware that self-reliance does not equal individualism and they are very clear that oppose individualism and desire co-operation. Given that Mitchinson quotes from their press release, he must know this and yet he asserts the opposite.

Mitchinson seems to equate self-reliance with “*individualism*” and so, presumably, capitalism. However, capitalists do not want self-reliant workers, they want order takers, people who will not question their authority. As David Noble points out, after an experiment in workers’ control General Electric replaces it with a the regime that was “*designed to ‘break’ the pilots of their new found ‘habits’ of self-reliance, self-discipline, and self-respect.*” [Forces of Production, p. 307]

Capitalists know the danger of self-reliant people. Self-reliant people question authority, think for themselves, do not follow leaders and bring these abilities into any groups they join. Thus self-reliance is not purely an individual thing, it also refers to groups **and** classes. Anarchists desire to see a self-reliant working class — a class which makes its own decisions and does not follow leaders. Thus, for anarchists, self-reliance refers to **both** individuals and groups (just as self-management and self-liberation does). Needless to say, for those in authority or those seeking authority self-reliance is an evil thing which must be combated. Hence Mitchinson’s diatribe — it is the cry of the would-be leader who is afraid his followers will not respect his authority.

## 20. Is anarchism an example of “*Philosophical idealism*”?

He turns to the May Day demonstration:

*“Guerrilla gardening and its related varieties that have sprung up in various places, is nothing more than an offshoot of the old utopian idea of changing society by example.”*

Actually, it was a specific demonstration to encourage people to get involved in collective action, to have a good time and challenge authority and the status quo. It was an attempt to change society by example only in the sense that it would encourage others to act, to challenge the status quo and get involved in collective action. If Mitchinson was consistent he would have to oppose **every** demonstration that occurred before the final insurrection that created the “workers’ state” — a demonstration is, by its very nature, an example to others of what is possible, an example of our collective strength and our desire for change. You may be critical of the nature of the guerrilla gardening action (and many anarchists are), but you cannot misrepresent its nature as Mitchinson does and be expected to be taken seriously.

He continues:

*“The roots of this scheme lie in idealist philosophy. Philosophical idealism refers to the notion that people’s actions are a consequence of their thoughts, that ideas and not our conditions of life determine our outlook. When, through a long process of accumulation, we change people’s minds, then they will live differently, capitalism will simply be redundant. The capitalist class themselves will presumably sit idly by and watch their system fall apart.”*

Given that the “anti-capitalist” demonstrations have met extensive state violence, it is clear that those involved are well aware that capitalist class will not just watch its power disappear.

Also, calling RTS’s action “*idealist philosophy*” is quite ironic for someone who seems intent in ignoring the history of Social Democracy and dismisses attempts to analyse the Bolsheviks in power as “*bourgeois slanders*.” However, Mitchinson in his diatribe forgets one of the basic arguments of materialism — namely that ideas themselves are part of the material world and so influence society and how it develops. He rejects the notion that people’s thoughts and ideas determine their actions. He obviously thinks that people operate on auto-pilot, not thinking about their actions. However, in reality, what people do is dependent on their thoughts — they think about their actions and what motivates them influences their activity. If thoughts did not determine people’s actions then Mitchinson would not have spent so much time writing this article!

Thus Mitchinson is well aware of the importance of ideas in social change, at least implicitly. Indeed, he argues for the need for a “*mass Labour youth organisation which, fighting for a socialist programme, could attract these young workers and students*.” To state the obvious, a socialist programme is a means to “*change people’s minds*” and present the possibility of creating a new society. Does he seriously think a socialist revolution is possible without changing people’s minds, getting them to desire a socialist society?

Moreover, if he had read Bakunin he would be aware that anarchists consider the class struggle as the way to change people’s ideas. As Bakunin argued:

*“the germs of [socialist thought] ... [are to] be found in the instinct of every earnest worker. The goal ... is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants, to unjam within him a stream of thought corresponding to his instinct ... What impedes the swifter development of this salutary thought among the working masses? Their ignorance to be sure, that is, for the most part the political and religious prejudices with which self-interested classes still try to obscure their conscious and their natural instinct. How can we dispel this ignorance and destroy these harmful prejudices? By education and propaganda? ... they are insufficient ... [and] who will conduct this propaganda? ... [The] workers’ world ... is left with but a single path, that of **emancipation through practical action** ... It means workers’ solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means **trade-unions, organisation** ... To deliver [the worker] from that ignorance [of reactionary ideas], the International relies on collective experience he gains in its bosom, especially on the progress of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses ... As soon as he begins to take an active part in this wholly material struggle, ... Socialism replaces religion in his mind... through practice and collective experience ... the progressive and development of the economic struggle will bring him more and more to recognise his true enemies ... The workers thus enlisted in the struggle will necessarily ... recognise himself to be a revolutionary socialist, and he will act as one.” [The Basic Bakunin, pp. 102–3]*

Thus anarchists are aware that experience determines thought but we are also aware that thought is essential for action. We recognise the importance of ideas in the class struggle but we also realise that the ideas people have change as a result of that struggle. To state otherwise is to misrepresent anarchist thought.

## 21. How is Mitchinson’s critique self-contradictory?

He continues his distortion:

*“Whilst believing in a revolutionary struggle to overthrow capitalism, anarchists argue that it must be replaced by...nothing.”*

This is ironic for quite a few reasons. Firstly, above Mitchinson claimed that anarchists did not aim to overthrow capitalism, just the state. Now he is claiming we **do** believe in overthrowing capitalism. Secondly, he quoted Trotsky saying that anarchists just ignore the state. Now Mitchinson states we aim to overthrow the capitalism via revolutionary struggle. How do you overthrow something via revolutionary struggle by ignoring it? His critique is not even internally consistent.

Moreover, he is well aware what anarchists want to replace capitalism with, after all he quotes an anarchist conference which stated that they aimed for *“the creation of an absolutely free economic organisation and federation based on work and equality”*! Bakunin was always arguing that the International Workers Association should become *“an earnest organisation of workers associations from all countries, capable of replacing this departing world of States and bourgeoisie.”* [The Basic Bakunin, p. 110] In other words, the *“future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association of workers, first in their unions, then in the communes,*

*regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.*” [Michael Bakunin: **Selected Writings**, p. 206] Even Engels acknowledged that the anarchists aimed to “*dispose all the authorities, abolish the state and replace it with the organisation of the International.*” [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Op. Cit.**, p. 72] Anyone with even a basic knowledge of anarchist theory would know this. And given that Mitchinson stated that “*Marx saw a future society without a state*” as well and that he quotes Trotsky as arguing “*Marxists are wholly in agreement with the anarchists in regard to the final goal: the liquidation of the state*” we can only assume that Marxists also aim at replacing it, eventually, when the state “*withers away*,” with “*nothing*.”

This sentence, more than any other, shows the level which some Marxists will sink to when discussing anarchism. It shows that the standard Marxist critique of anarchism is little more than an inconsistent collection of lies, distortion and misrepresentation. Mitchinson not only contradicts his ideological gurus, he even contradicts himself! That is truly impressive.

## 22. How did Trotsky make the trains run on time?

Mitchinson asks:

*“Yet with no central apparatus, no organisation, how would the trains run on time, how could organ transplants be organised, how could the world’s resources be channelled into permanently overcoming famine.”*

Firstly, we must note the usual fallacy — being opposed to a “*central apparatus*” does not imply “*no organisation*.” Instead of centralised organisation, anarchists propose **federal** organisations in which co-ordination is achieved by collective decision making from the bottom up. In other words, rather than delegate power into the hands of “*leaders*”, an anarchist organisation leaves power at the bottom and co-ordination results from collective agreements that reflect the needs of those directly affected by them. Thus a federal organisation co-ordinates activities but in a bottom-up fashion rather than top-down, as in a centralised body.

Secondly, needless to say, anarchists are quite clear on who would make the trains run on time — the railway workers. Anarchists are firm supporters of workers’ self-management. Anyone with even a basic understanding of anarchist theory would know that. Moreover, the experience of workers’ self-management of the railways by the anarchist union the CNT during the Spanish Revolution indicates that such anarchism can, and does, ensure that the trains run on time. In contrast, the experience of Russia — when the Bolsheviks did create a “*central apparatus*” — proved a total failure. It is quite appropriate that Mitchinson uses the “*trains running on time*” example, after all it is what apologists for Italian fascism praised Mussolini for! This is because Trotsky (when he ran the railways) did so in a way that Mussolini would have been proud of — he subjected the railway workers to military discipline:

*“Due to the Civil War — and to other factors less often mentioned, such as the attitude of the railway workers to the ‘new’ regime — the Russian railways had virtually ceased to function. Trotsky, Commissar for Transport, was granted wide emergency powers [in August 1920] to try out his theories of ‘militarisation of labour.’ He started out placing the railwaymen and the personnel of the repair workshops under martial law. When the railwaymen’s trade union objected, he summarily ousted its leaders and, **with the full***

*support and endorsement of the Party leadership, 'appointed others willing to do his bidding. He repeated the procedure in other unions of transport workers.'*" [Maurice Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. 67]

He ruled the "central apparatus" he created, called the Tsektran, "along strict military and bureaucratic lines." [Ibid.] The trains did start moving again, of course. The question is — do workers manage their own activity or does some other group. Trotsky and Lenin in power decided for the latter — and built the "centralised apparatus" required to ensure that result. Needless to say, Trotsky did not justify his militarisation of work in terms of necessary evils resulting from appalling objective conditions. Rather he saw it as a matter of "principle":

*"The working class cannot be left wandering all over Russia. They must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded, just like soldiers."*

*"The very principle of compulsory labour is for the Communist quite unquestionable ... the only solution to economic difficulties from the point of view of both principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power ... and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation and utilisation."*

*"The introduction of compulsory labour service is unthinkable without the application ... of the methods of militarisation of labour."* [quoted by M. Brinton, **Op. Cit.**, p. 61 and p. 66]

Why "principle"? Perhaps because Marx and Engels had stated in **The Communist Manifesto** that one of the measures required during the revolution was the "[e]stablishment of industrial armies"? [Selected Writings, p. 53]

Moreover, the experience of "central apparatus" in Bolshevik Russia helped create famine — the vast bureaucracy spawned by the "workers' state" could not handle the information a centralised distribution system required. Food rotted in trains waiting for bureaucrats to "channel" resources (and, needless to say, the bureaucrats never went hungry).

## 23. Can centralised planning meet the needs of the whole of society?

Our Marxist friend then quotes **Maybe**:

*"The radical social movements that are increasingly coming together don't want to seize power but to dissolve it. They are dreaming up many autonomous alternative forms of social organisation, forms that are directly linked to the specific needs of locality. What might be an alternative to capitalism for people living currently in a housing estate in Croydon is completely different to what might be suitable for the inhabitants of the slums of Delhi."*

He comments on these very sensible words:

*"It cannot be of no concern to us what form a new society will take in different countries or even different regions. The economic power we have created over centuries can and must be used in a planned, rational way to eradicate hunger, disease and illiteracy. It must be used in the interests of the whole of society."*

Obviously, the needs of actual people, what sort of society they want, is irrelevant to Marxism. Also ignored is the fact that different cultures will have different visions of what a free society will be like. Thus, for Mitchinson, everyone, everywhere, will be subject to the same form of society — “*in the interests of society.*” However, as Bakunin argued, the state “*is an arbitrary creature in whose breast all the positive, living, individual or local interests of the people clash, destroy and absorb each other into the abstraction known as the common interest, the **public good** or the **public welfare**, and where all real wills are dissolved into the other abstraction that bears the name of **the will of the people**. It follows that this alleged will of the people is never anything but the sacrifice and dissolution of all the real wants of the population, just as this so-called public good is nothing but the sacrifice of their interests.*” [Michael Bakunin: *Selected Writings*, pp. 265–6]

The different needs of different areas and regions must be the starting point of any social reconstruction, the basis on which we create specific programmes to improve our societies, eco-systems and world. If we do not recognise the diversity inherent in a world of billions of people, millions of eco-systems, thousands of cultures, hundreds of regions then we cannot use the resources of society to improve our lives. Instead we would have uniform plan imposed on everything which, by its very nature, cannot take into accounts the real needs of those who make up “*the whole of society.*” In other words, the resources of the world must not be used by an abstraction claiming to act “*in the interests of society*” but rather by the people who actually make up society themselves — if we do that we ensure that their interests are met directly as they manage their own affairs and that their use reflects the specific requirements of specific people and eco-systems and not some abstraction called “*the interests of society*” which, by its centralised nature, would sacrifice those interests.

Of course, it seems somewhat strange that Mitchinson thinks that people in, say, New Delhi or Croyden, will not seek to eradicate hunger, disease and illiteracy as they see fit, co-operating with others as and when they need to and creating the federative organisations required to do so. The need to share experiences and resources does not conflict with the different areas experimenting in different ways, expressing themselves in ways which suit their particular needs and difficulties. As any ecologist could tell you, different eco-systems need different forms of care. The same with communities — Mitchinson would drown local needs in the name of an artificial construct.

He continues:

*“That can only be achieved by the democratic planning of society where the power at our fingertips could be used with due respect for the future of the planet, the conservation of it’s resources, our own working conditions, and living standards. Whether we like it or not, growing a few carrots on empty plots of land will not eradicate hunger and famine.”*

How can “*democratic planning*” of the whole “*of society*” take into account the needs of specific localities, eco-systems, communities? It cannot. Respect for the future of our planet means respecting the fundamental law of nature — namely that conformity is death. Diversity is the law of life — which means that a future socialist society must be libertarian, organised from the bottom up, based on local self-management and a respect for diversity. Such a federal structures does not preclude co-ordinated activity (or the creation of democratic **plans**) — the reverse in fact, as federalism exists to allow co-ordination — but instead of being imposed by a few “*leaders*” as in a centralised system, it is the product of local needs and so reflective of the needs of real people and eco-systems.

As for his comment about “*due respect of the future of the planet*” is obviously inspired by “*the youth*” being concerned about ecological issues. However, Leninism’s desire for centralised states and planning excludes an ecological perspective by definition. As Bakunin argued:

*“What man, what group of individuals, no matter how great their genius, would dare to think themselves able to embrace and understand the plethora of interests, attitudes and activities so various in every country, every province, locality and profession.” [Op. Cit., p. 240]*

Diversity is the basis of any eco-system. Centralism cannot, as Bakunin makes clear, embrace it.

Needless to say, Mitchinson’s comments about carrots is pure stupidity and an insult to the intelligence of his audience.

## 24. Is technology neutral?

Mitchinson goes on:

*“We have the power to do just that, but only if we combine new technology, industry and the talents and active participation of millions.”*

Needless to say, he fails to indicate how the millions **can** participate in a “*centralised apparatus*” beyond electing their “*leaders*.” Which indicates the fallacy of Marxism — it claims to desire a society based on the participation of everyone yet favours a form of organisation — centralisation — that precludes that participation.

In addition, he fails to note that technology and industry have been developed by capitalists to enhance their own power. As we argued in section D.10, technology cannot be viewed in isolation from the class struggle. This means that industry and technology was not developed to allow the active participation of millions. The first act of any revolution will be seizing of the means of life — including industry and technology — by those who use it and, from that moment on, their radical transformation into **appropriate** technology and industry, based on the needs of the workers, the community and the planet. Mitchinson obviously shares the common Marxist failing of believing technology and industry is neutral. In this he follows Lenin. As S.A. Smith correctly summarises:

*“Lenin believed that socialism could be built only on the basis of large-scale industry as developed by capitalism, with its specific types of productivity and social organisation of labour. Thus for him, capitalist methods of labour-discipline or one-man management were not necessarily incompatible with socialism. Indeed, he went so far as to consider them to be inherently progressive, failing to recognise that such methods undermined workers’ initiative at the point of production. This was because Lenin believed that the transition to socialism was guaranteed, ultimately, not by the self-activity of workers, but by the ‘proletarian’ character of state power... There is no doubt that Lenin did conceive proletarian power in terms of the central state and lacked a conception of localising such power at the point of production.” [Red Petrograd, pp. 261–2]*

The Russian workers, unsurprisingly, had a different perspective:

*“Implicit in the movement for workers’ control was a belief that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In their battle to democratise the factory, in their emphasis on the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming the work situation, the factory committees had become aware — in a partial and groping way, to be sure — that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction — the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute ... inscribed within their practice was a distinctive vision of socialism, central to which was workplace democracy.” [Op. Cit., p. 261]*

The movement for workers’ control was undermined and finally replaced by one-man management by the kind of “central apparatus” Mitchinson urges us to build (see M. Brinton’s classic work **The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control** for more details). Those who do not study history are doomed to repeat it.

He goes on:

*“The economic power we have created can be compared to the destructive force of lightning, untamed and anarchic under the market, yet organised into cables and wires electricity transforms our lives. Industry is not the enemy, nor are machines. The state is, but it is a symptom not the disease. It is capitalism and its ownership of the economy, its stewardship of society that we have to replace.”*

However, unlike electricity, “economic power” requires people to operate it. The question is not whether “machines” are the enemy (often they are, as machines are used by capitalists to weaken the power of workers and control them). The question is whether the future society we aim at is one based on workers’ and community self-management or whether it is based on an authoritarian system of delegated power. It is clear that Marxists like Mitchinson desire the latter — indeed, as is clear from his diatribe, he cannot comprehend an alternative to hierarchical organisation.

Given that one of the things capitalism and the state have in common is a hierarchical, top-down structure, it is clear that any revolutionary movement must fight both — at the same time.

## 25. Do anarchists ignore the “*strength of the working class*”?

Mitchinson argues that:

*“The task of our time is to combine the strength and experience of the working class and its mighty organisations with the power and energy of the youth internationally, on the basis of a clear understanding of what capitalism is, what the state is, and a programme for changing society. That requires a combination of theory and action. In that combination lies the strength of Marxism.”*

The first question is surely **what** “mighty organisations” of the working class is he talking about. Is it the Labour Party? Or is it the trade unions? Probably the latter — if so, the question



is how effective have these “*mighty organisations*” been recently? The answer must, surely, be “not very.” Why is that? In union there is strength, as anarchists have long been aware. Why has this strength been so lacking? Simply because the unions are centralised, bureaucratic and run from the top down. They have placed numerous barriers in front of their members when they have taken militant action. That is why anarchists urge workers to form rank-and-file controlled organisations to manage their own struggles and take back the power they have delegated to their so-called leaders. Only in this way, by building truly revolutionary organisations like workers’ councils (soviets), factory committees, community assemblies and so on can they really create a “*mighty*” force. In other words, anarchists are well aware of the strength of working class people and their power to change society — indeed, as proven above, anarchism is based on that awareness and organise appropriately!

The second question is surely to ask whether Mitchinson is aware that **Reclaim the Streets** have been building links with rank and file trade union militants for years — long before Mitchinson decided to enlighten them with “*the strength of Marxism*.” In other words, “*the strength of Marxism*” seems to rest in telling radical working class people to do what they have already doing! Such strength is truly amazing and must explain the prominent role Leninists have had in the numerous anti-capitalist demonstrations and organisations recently.

Needless to say, **anarchism** provides “*a clear understanding of what capitalism is, what the state is, and a programme for changing society. That requires a combination of theory and action*.” This has been proven above when we corrected Mitchinson’s numerous errors regarding anarchist theory. Moreover, as far as combining theory and action goes, it is clear that **anarchism** has been doing that of late, **not** Marxism. While anarchists have been at the forefront of the anti-capitalist demonstrations, working with others as equals, Marxists have been noticeable by their absence. Combining theory and practice, non-hierarchically organised direct action closed down the WTO and presented a clear message to the oppressed around the world — **resistance is fertile**. What have Marxists achieved? Apparently producing articles such as these, distorting the politics and activities of those who actually **are** changing the world rather than just interpreting it. That they cannot produce an honest critique of anarchism indicates the uselessness of their politics.

## 26. What does Mitchinson’s article tell about the nature of Trotskyism?

He finishes his diatribe as follows:

*“If you want to fight against capitalism, do so fully armed with a socialist programme and perspective. Join with us in the struggle for the socialist transformation of the planet.”*

It is clear that to be “*fully armed with a socialist programme*” means to critique that which you know nothing about, spread slanders and lie about what your opponents actually think. There is much to be critical of in the recent anti-capitalist demonstrations and the various groups that have helped organise and take part in them. Anarchists have been the first to point these out. However, we have a lot to learn from them as well — they are struggling against capitalism and, as Kropotkin argues, “*Anarchism ... originated in everyday struggles*” and “*the Anarchist movement*

*was renewed each time it received an impression from some great practical lesson: it derived its origin from the teachings of life itself.*" [Evolution and Environment, p. 58 and p. 57]

Thus we must critique these movements honestly and as equals — Mitchinson, as can be seen, does neither. He slanders those involved and dismisses out of hand their experiences and the reasons that have brought them to struggle in a specific way against the dominant society. In this he follows Lenin, who argued in **Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder** that western revolutionaries ignore their own experiences in their own — and similar — countries and instead follow the “lessons” of experiences gained in a near pre-capitalist, absolutist state. The stupidity of such an approach is clear.

Mitchinson presents those in struggle with the ultimatum “subscribe to our platform or be denounced.” Little wonder that Leninists are non-existent in the groups that have taken part and organised the anti-capitalist demonstrations — not willing to learn from those involved in the class struggle, all they can do is act as petty sectarians. Sectarians expect working class people to relate to their predetermined political positions, whereas revolutionaries apply our politics to the conditions we face as members of the working class. For Leninists revolutionary consciousness is not generated by working class self-activity, but is embodied in the party. The important issues facing the working class — and how to fight — are to be determined not by the workers ourselves, but by the leadership of the party, who are the “vanguard of the working class”. Hence Mitchinson’s dismissal (in a particularly dishonest manner, we must stress) of those involved in struggle and their experiences. True “revolution” obviously lies in the unchanging ideas generated at the start of the twentieth century in a monarchy developing towards capitalism, **not** in the experiences and desires of living people fighting for freedom in the here and now. Yes, these ideas and movements can be confused and unclear — but they are living and subject to change by the influence of revolutionaries who act in a libertarian manner (i.e. as equals, willing to learn as well as teach).

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci once wrote that “*to tell the truth is a communist and revolutionary act.*” However, even he did not apply this when discussing anarchism and the activities of anarchists (see Gwyn Williams’ **Proletarian Order**, pp. 193–4). Be that as it may, Gramsci’s point is correct. Telling the truth is a revolutionary act. If we judge Mitchinson’s article by this standard then we can only conclude that neither he nor the politics he defends are revolutionary or communist.

Thus we find his ending comment truly a “*flight of fancy*” — after reading our comments above, we hope you agree with us. If you seek a **true** socialist transformation of this planet rather than its degeneration into centralised state capitalism, discover more about anarchism.

# Reply to errors and distortions in the SWP's *"Marxism and Anarchism"*

In issue no. 1714 of Socialist Worker (dated 16<sup>th</sup> September 2000) the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) decided to expose anarchism in an article entitled *"Marxism and Anarchism."* However, their article is little more than a series of errors and distortions. We shall indicate how the SWP lies about anarchist ideas and discuss the real differences between anarchism and Marxism. Moreover, we will indicate that the bulk of the SWP's article just recycles common Leninist slanders about anarchism, slanders that have been refuted many times over.

## 1. What does the anti-globalisation movement tell us about the effectiveness of the "vanguard" parties like the SWP?

The inspiration for their diatribe is clear — they are worried about anarchist influence in the various anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movements and demonstrations which are currently occurring across the world. As they put it:

*"The great revolt against capitalism in Seattle last year, and similar demonstrations since, have attracted diverse groups of protesters. Anarchists, amongst others, have taken part in all of those protests."*

Yes, indeed, anarchists have been involved in these demonstrations from the start, unlike "vanguard" parties like the SWP who only became aware of the significance of these movements once they exploded in the streets. That in itself should tell us something about the effectiveness of the Bolshevik inspired politics the SWP raise as an alternative to anarchism. Rather than being at the vanguard of these demonstrations and movements, parties like the SWP have been, post-Seattle, busy trying to catch up with them. Nor is this the only time this has happened.

In Russia, in February 1917, for example, the Bolshevik party opposed the actions that produced the revolution which overthrew the Tsar. After weeks of strikes with police attacks on factories, the most oppressed part of the working class, the women textile workers, took the initiative. Demands for bread and attacks on bakeries were superseded by a massive demonstration of women workers on International Women's Day. The women had ignored a local Bolshevik directive to wait until May Day! The early slogan of *"Bread!"* was quickly followed by *"Down with the autocracy! Down with the war!"* By February 24<sup>th</sup>, half of Petrograd was on strike. The workers did go to their factories, not to work, but to hold meetings, pass resolutions and then go out to demonstrate. The Vyborg committee of the Bolsheviks opposed the strikes. Luckily for the Russian workers, and unfortunately for the Tsar, the Bolsheviks were ignored. If they had followed the Bolsheviks, the February Revolution would not have occurred!

The backward nature of the Bolshevik style of party can also be seen from events 12 years earlier. In 1905, workers spontaneously organised councils of workers' delegates ("soviets" in Russian). The soviets were based on workplaces electing recallable delegates to co-ordinate strikes and were created by the Russian workers themselves, independently of political parties.

Far from being at the vanguard of these developments the Bolsheviks were, in fact, deeply hostile to them. The Bolshevik Central Committee members in Petersburg were uneasy at the thought of a "*non-Party*" mass organisation existing side by side with their party. Instead of seeing the Soviet as a form of workers' self-organisation and self-activity (and so a key area for activity), they regarded it with hostility. They saw it as a rival to the party.

The St. Petersburg Bolsheviks organised a campaign against the Soviet due to its "*non-Party*" nature. They presented an ultimatum to the Soviet that it must place itself under the leadership of their party. On 24 October they had moved a resolution along the same lines in meetings at the various factories, demanding that the Soviet accept the Social Democratic programme and tactics and demanding that it must define its political stance.

The Bolshevik Central Committee then published a resolution, that was binding upon all Bolsheviks throughout Russia, insisting that the soviets must accept the party programme. Agitation against the soviet continued. On 29 October, the Bolshevik's Nevsky district committee declared inadmissible for Social Democrats to participate in any kind of "*workers' parliament*" like the Soviet.

The Bolshevik argument was that the Soviet of Workers' Deputies should not have existed as a political organisation and that the social democrats must withdraw from it, since its existence acted negatively upon the development of the social democratic movement. The Soviet of Delegates could remain as a trade union organisation, or not at all. Indeed, the Bolsheviks presented the Soviet with an ultimatum: either accept the programme of the Bolsheviks or else disband! The Bolshevik leaders justified their hostility to the Soviet on the grounds that it represented "*the subordination of consciousness to spontaneity*" — in this they followed Lenin's arguments in **What is to be Done?**. When they moved their ultimatum in the Soviet it was turned down and the Bolshevik delegates, led by the Central Committee members, walked out. The other delegates merely shrugged their shoulders and proceeded to the next point on the agenda.

If workers had followed the Bolsheviks the 1905 revolution would not have occurred and the first major experience of workers' councils would never have happened. Rather than being in favour of working class self-management and power, the Bolsheviks saw revolution in terms of party power. This confusion remained during and after 1917 when the Bolsheviks finally supported the soviets (although purely as a means of ensuring a Bolshevik government).

Similarly, during the British Poll Tax rebellion of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the SWP dismissed the community based mass non-payment campaign. Instead they argued for workers to push their trade unions leadership to call strikes to overthrow the tax. Indeed, they even argued that there was a "*danger that community politics divert people from the means to won, from the need to mobilise working class activity on a collective basis*" by which they meant trade union basis. They argued that the state machine would "*wear down community resistance if it cannot tap the strength of the working class.*" Of course it goes without saying that the aim of the community-based non-payment campaign was working class activity on a collective basis. This explains the creation of anti-poll tax unions, organising demonstrations, occupations of sheriff officers/bailiffs offices and council buildings, the attempts to resist warrant sales by direct action, the attempts to create links with rank-and-file trade unionists and so on. Indeed, the SWP's strategy meant

mobilising fewer people in collective struggle as trade union members were a minority of those affected by the tax as well as automatically excluding those workers **not** in unions, people who were unemployed, housewives, students and so on. Little wonder the SWP failed to make much of an impact in the campaign.

However, once non-payment began in earnest and showed hundreds of thousands involved and refusing to pay, overnight the SWP became passionate believers in the collective class power of community based non-payment. They argued, in direct contradiction to their earlier analysis, that the state was “*shaken by the continuing huge scale of non-payment.*” [quoted by Trotwatch, *Carry on Recruiting*, pp. 29–31]

The SWP proved to be totally unresponsive to new forms of struggle and organisation produced by working class people when resisting the government. In this they followed the Bolshevik tradition closely — the Bolsheviks initially ignored the soviets created during the 1905 Russian Revolution and then asked them to disband. They only recognised their importance in 1917, 12 years after that revolution was defeated and the soviets had re-appeared.

Therefore, the fact that the self-proclaimed “vanguard of the proletariat” is actually miles behind the struggle comes as no surprise. Nor are their slanders against those, like anarchists, who are at the front of the struggle unsurprising. They produced similar articles during the poll tax rebellion as well, to counter anarchist influence by smearing our ideas.

## 2. What does the SWP miss out in its definition of anarchism?

The SWP continue:

*“Anarchism is generally taken to mean a rejection of all authority.”*

One question immediately arises. What do anarchists mean by the term “*authority*”? Without knowing that, it will be difficult to evaluate the SWP’s arguments.

Kropotkin provides the answer. He argued that “*the origin of the anarchist inception of society ... [lies in] the criticism ... of the hierarchical organisations and the authoritarian conceptions of society; and ... the analysis of the tendencies that are seen in the progressive movements of mankind.*” He stresses that anarchism “*refuses all hierarchical organisation.*” [Kropotkin’s *Revolutionary Pamphlets*, p. 158 and p. 137]

Thus anarchism rejects authority in the sense, to use Malatesta’s words, of “*the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands a few.*” [Anarchy, p. 40] Once this is clearly understood, it will quickly be seen that the SWP create a straw man to defeat in argument.

Moreover, by concentrating on what anarchism is **against** the SWP can ignore what anarchism is **for**. This is important as to discuss the positive ideas of anarchism would mean having to discuss anarchists ideas on organisation, why we oppose centralisation, favour federalism as a means of co-ordinating decisions, why we propose self-management in place of government, and so on. To do this would mean accurately presenting libertarian theory rather than a just series of slanders, which, of course, the SWP would hate to do.

So what is anarchism for?

Anarchism derives from the Greek for “**without authority**” or “**without rulers**” and this informs anarchist theory and visions of a better world. This means that anarchism is against

the “*domination of man by man*” (and woman by woman, woman by man, and so on). However, “[a]s knowledge has penetrated the governed masses ... the people have revolted against the form of authority then felt most intolerable. This spirit of revolt in the individual and the masses, is the natural and necessary fruit of the spirit of domination; the vindication of human dignity, and the saviour of social life.” Thus “*freedom is the necessary preliminary to any true and equal human association.*” [Charlotte Wilson, *Anarchist Essays*, p. 54 and p. 40] In other words, anarchist comes from the struggle of the oppressed against their rulers and is an expression of individual and social freedom. Anarchism was born from the class struggle.

This means, positively, that anarchists stress the need for **self-government** (often called **self-management**) of both individuals and groups. Self-management within free associations and decision making from the bottom-up is the only way domination can be eliminated. This is because, by making our own decisions ourselves, we automatically end the division of society into governors and governed (i.e. end hierarchy). In other words, those affected by a decision make that decision. Anarchism clearly means support for freedom and equality and so all forms of hierarchical organisation (such as the state and the capitalist workplace) and authoritarian social relationship (such as sexism, racism, homophobia and wage labour) must be abolished. This means that anarchist organisations must be self-managed, decentralised and based on federalism. Only this form of organisation can end the division of society into rulers and ruled, oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited and create a society of free and equal individuals.

This is why anarchists stress such things as decision making by mass assemblies and the co-ordination of decisions by mandated and recallable delegates. The federal structure which unites these basic assemblies would allow local affairs to be decided upon locally and directly, with wider issues discussed and decided upon at their appropriate level and by all involved. This would allow those affected by a decision to have a say in it, so allowing them to manage their own affairs directly and without hierarchy. This, in turn, would encourage the self-reliance, self-confidence and initiative of those involved. As a necessary complement of our opposition to authority is support for “**direct action.**” This means that people, rather than looking to leaders or politicians to act for them, look to themselves and the own individual and collective strength to solve their own problems. This also encourages self-liberation, self-reliance and self-confidence as the prevailing culture would be “*if we want something sorted out, we have to do it ourselves*” — in other words, a “*do it yourself*” mentality.

Therefore, the **positive** side of anarchism (which naturally flows from its opposition to authority) results in a political theory which argues that people must control their own struggles, organisations and affairs directly. This means we support mass assemblies and their federation via councils of mandated delegates subject to recall if they break their mandates (i.e. they act as they see fit, i.e. as politicians or bureaucrats, and not as the people who elected them desire). This way people directly govern themselves and control their own lives. It means we oppose the state and support free federations of self-governing associations and communes. It means we oppose capitalism and support workers’ self-management. It means we reject hierarchy, centralism and authoritarian structures and argue for self-managed organisations, built from the bottom up and always accountable to the base. It means we consider the direct control of struggles and movements by those involved as not only essential in the here and now but also essential training for living in a free, libertarian socialist society (for example, workers direct and total control of their strikes and unions trains them to control their workplaces and communities during and after the revolution). It means we oppose hierarchy in all its forms and support free association of

equals. In other words, anarchism can generally be taken to mean support for self-government or self-management.

By discussing only the negative side of anarchism, by missing out what kinds of authority anarchists oppose, the SWP ensure that these aspects of our ideas are not mentioned in their article. For good reason as it puts Marxism in a bad light.

### 3. Why does mentioning the history of anarchism weaken the SWP's argument?

The SWP correctly argue that we *"live in a world of bullying line managers, petty school rules, oppressive police, and governments that serve the rich and powerful."* However, they trivialise anarchism (and the natural feelings that result from such domination) by stating *"[e]veryone who hates that has, at least at times, felt a streak of 'anarchist' revolt against authority."* Thus anarchism is presented as an emotional response rather than as valid, coherent intellectual opposition to the state, wage labour, inequality and hierarchical authority in general. But, of course, anarchism is more than this, as the SWP acknowledge:

*"Anarchism, however, is more than a personal reaction against the tyrannies of capitalism. It is a set of political beliefs which have been held up as an alternative to the revolutionary socialist ideas of Karl Marx. Anarchist ideas have, on occasion, had a mass influence on movements against capitalism."*

Given that the *"revolutionary socialist ideas"* of Marx have been proven wrong on numerous occasions while Bakunin's predictions were proven right, anarchists humbly suggest that anarchism is a valid alternative to Marxism. For example, Bakunin correctly predicted that when *"the workers ... send common workers ... to Legislative Assemblies ... The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois ... For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them."* [The Basic Bakunin, p. 108] The history of the Marxist Social Democratic Parties across the world proved him right.

Similarly, Bakunin predicted that Marx's *"dictatorship of the proletariat"* would become the *"dictatorship over the proletariat."* The experience of the Russian Revolution proved him correct — once the Bolshevik party had become the government power became centralised at the top, the workers' soviets quickly became a cog in the state machinery rubber-stamping the decrees of the Bolshevik government, workers' control of production by factory committees was replaced by state appointed managers and so on. The "socialist" state quickly became a bureaucratic monster without real control from below (indeed, the Bolsheviks actually disbanded soviets when opposition parties won a majority in them at the start of 1918). The start of the Civil War in May 1918 just made things worse.

The SWP continue by arguing:

*"Socialists and anarchists share a hatred of capitalism. They have often fought alongside each other in major battles against the capitalist system. They struggled together in the Europe-wide mass strikes at the end of the First World War and the inspiring Spanish Revolution in 1936, as well as in countless smaller battles today."*

Which is true. They also fail to mention that the mass-strikes at the end of the First World War were defeated by the actions of the Social-Democratic Parties and trade unions. These parties were self-proclaimed revolutionary Marxist organisations, utilising (as Marx had argued) the ballot box and centralised organisations. Unsurprisingly, given the tactics and structure, reformism and bureaucracy had developed within them. When workers took strike action, even occupying their factories in Italy, the bureaucracy of the Social Democratic Parties and trade unions acted to undermine the struggle, isolating workers and supporting capitalism. Indeed, the German Social Democratic Party (which was, pre-1914, considered the jewel in the crown of Marxism and the best means to refute the anarchist critique of Marxist tactics) actually organised an alliance with the right-wing para-military Freikorps to violently suppress the revolution. The Marxist movement had degenerated into bourgeois parties, as Bakunin predicted.

It is also strange that the SWP mention the “*inspiring Spanish Revolution in 1936*” as this revolution was mainly anarchist in its “*inspiring*” features. Workers took over workplaces and the land, organising them under workers’ self-management. Direct democracy was practised by hundreds of thousands of workers in line with the organisational structures of the anarchist union the C.N.T. In contrast, the Russian Revolution saw power become centralised into the hands of the Bolshevik party leadership and workers’ self-management of production was eliminated in favour of one-man management imposed from above (see M. Brinton’s **The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control** for details).

#### 4. How is the SWP wrong about centralisation?

The SWP continue by arguing that “*there are differences between revolutionary socialism and anarchism. Both understand the need for organisation but disagree over what form that organisation takes.*” This is a vast step forward in the usual Marxist slander that anarchists reject the need for organisation and so should be welcomed. Unfortunately the rest of the discussion on this issue falls back into the usual swamp of slander.

They argue that “[e]very struggle, from a local campaign against housing privatisation to a mass strike of millions of workers, raises the need for organisation. People come together and need mechanisms for deciding what to do and how to do it.” They continue by arguing that “*Anarchism says that organisation has nothing to do with centralisation. For anarchism, any form of centralisation is a type of authority, which is oppressive.*”

This is true, anarchists do argue that centralisation places power at the centre, so disempowering the people at the base of an organisation. In order to co-ordinate activity anarchists propose federal structures, made up of mandated delegates from autonomous assemblies. In this way, co-ordination is achieved while ensuring that power remains at the bottom of the organisation, in the hands of those actually fighting or doing the work. Federalism does not deny the need to make agreements and to co-ordinate decisions. Far from it — it was put forward by anarchists precisely to ensure co-ordination of joint activity and to make agreements in such a way as to involve those subject to those decisions in the process of making them. Federalism **involves** people in managing their own affairs and so they develop their initiative, self-reliance, judgement and spirit of revolt so that they can act intelligently, quickly and autonomously during a crisis or revolutionary moment and show solidarity as and when required instead of waiting for commands from above as occurs with centralised movements. In other words, federalism is the



means to combine participation and co-ordination and to create an organisation run from the bottom up rather than the top-down. As can be seen, anarchists do not oppose co-ordination and co-operation, making agreements and implementing them together.

After mentioning centralisation, the SWP make a massive jump of logic and assert:

*“But arguing with someone to join a struggle, and trying to put forward tactics and ideas that can take it forward are attempts to lead.*

*“It is no good people coming together in a struggle, discussing what to do and then doing just what they feel like as if no discussion had taken place. We always need to take the best ideas and act on them in a united way.”*

Placing ideas before a group of people is a “lead” but it is not centralisation. Moreover, anarchists are not against making agreements! Far from it. The aim of federal organisation is to make agreements, to co-ordinate struggles and activities. This does not mean ignoring agreements. As Kropotkin argued, the commune “cannot any longer acknowledge any superior: that, above it, there cannot be anything, save the interests of the Federation, freely embraced by itself in concert with other Communes.” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 259] This vision was stressed in the C.N.T.’s resolution on Libertarian Communism made in May, 1936, which stated that “the foundation of this administration will be the Commune. These Communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels for the purpose of achieving goals of a general nature. The right of autonomy is not to preclude the duty of implementation of agreements regarding collective benefits.” [quoted by Jose Pierats, *The C.N.T. in the Spanish Revolution*, p. 68] In the words of Malatesta:

*“But an organisation, it is argued, presupposes an obligation to co-ordinate one’s own activities with those of others; thus it violates liberty and fetters initiative. As we see it, what really takes away liberty and makes initiative impossible is the isolation which renders one powerless. Freedom is not an abstract right but the possibility of acting ... it is by co-operation with his fellows that man finds the means to express his activity and his power of initiative.”* [Life and Ideas, pp. 86–7]

Hence anarchists do not see making collective decisions and working in a federation as an abandonment of autonomy or a violation of anarchist theory and principles. Rather, we see such co-operation and co-ordination, generated from below upwards, as an essential means of exercising and protecting freedom.

The SWP’s comment against anarchism is a typical Marxist position. The assumption seems to be that “centralisation” or “centralism” equals co-ordination and, because we reject centralisation, anarchists must reject co-ordination, planning and agreements. However, in actuality, anarchists have always stressed the need for federalism to co-ordinate joint activities, stressing that decision-making and organisation must flow from below upwards so that the mass of the population can manage their own affairs directly (i.e. practice self-management and so anarchy). Unfortunately, Marxists fail to acknowledge this, instead asserting we are against co-operation, co-ordination and making agreements. The SWP’s arguments are an example of this, making spurious arguments about the need for making agreements.

In this the SWP are following in a long-line of Marxist inventions. For example, Engels asserted in his infamous diatribe “*The Bakuninists at work*” that Bakunin “[a]s early as September 1870 (in

his *Lettres a un francais* [Letters to a Frenchman]) ... had declared that the only way to drive the Prussians out of France by a revolutionary struggle was to do away with all forms of centralised leadership and leave each town, each village, each parish to wage war on its own.” [Marx, Engels and Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p. 141]

In fact, the truth is totally different. Bakunin does, of course, reject “centralised leadership” as it would be “necessarily very circumscribed, very short-sighted, and its limited perception cannot, therefore, penetrate the depth and encompass the whole complex range of popular life.” However, it is a falsehood to state that he denies the need for co-ordination of struggles and federal organisation from the bottom up in that or any other work. As he puts it, the revolution must “foster the self-organisation of the masses into autonomous bodies, federated from the bottom upwards.” With regards to the peasants, he thinks they will “come to an understanding, and form some kind of organisation ... to further their mutual interests ... the necessity to defend their homes, their families, and their own lives against unforeseen attack ... will undoubtedly soon compel them to contract new and mutually suitable arrangements.” The peasants would be “freely organised from the bottom up.” [“Letters to a French”, *Bakunin on Anarchism*, p. 196, p. 206 and p. 207] In this he repeated his earlier arguments concerning social revolution — claims Engels was well aware of, just as he was well aware of the statements by Bakunin in his “Letters to a Frenchman.” In other words, Engels deliberately lied about Bakunin’s political ideas. It appears that the SWP is simply following the Marxist tradition in their article.

## 5. Why does the SWP’s “picket line is ‘authoritarian’” argument totally miss the point?

They continue by arguing:

*“Not all authority is bad. A picket line is ‘authoritarian.’ It tries to impose the will of the striking workers on the boss, the police and on any workers who may be conned into scabbing on the strike.”*

What should strike the reader about this example is its total lack of class analysis. In this the SWP follow Engels. In his essay *On Authority*, Engels argues that a “revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon-authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror its arms inspire in the reactionaries.” [The Marx-Engels Reader, p. 733]

However, such an analysis is without a class basis and so will, by necessity, mislead the writer and the reader. Engels argues that revolution is the imposition by “one part of the population” on another. Very true — but Engels fails to indicate the nature of class society and, therefore, of a social revolution. In a class society “one part of the population” constantly “imposes its will upon the other part” all the time. In other words, the ruling class imposes its will on the working class everyday in work by the hierarchical structure of the workplace and in society by the state. Discussing the “population” as if it was not divided by classes, and so subject to specific forms of authoritarian social relationships, is liberal nonsense. Once we recognise that the “population” in question is divided into classes we can easily see the fallacy of Engels argument. In a social

revolution, the act of revolution is the overthrow of the power and authority of an oppressing and exploiting class by those subject to that oppression and exploitation. In other words, it is an act of liberation in which the hierarchical power of the few over the many is eliminated and replaced by the freedom of the many to control their own lives. It is hardly authoritarian to destroy authority! Thus a social revolution is, fundamentally, an act of liberation for the oppressed who act in their own interests to end the system in which “*one part of population imposes its will upon the other*” everyday.

This applies equally to the SWP’s example of a picket line. Is a picket line really authoritarian because it tries to impose its will on the boss, police or scabs? Rather, is it not defending the workers’ freedom against the authoritarian power of the boss and their lackeys (the police and scabs)? Is it “*authoritarian*” to resist authority and create a structure — a strike assembly and picket line — which allows the formally subordinated workers to manage their own affairs directly and without bosses? Is it “*authoritarian*” to combat the authority of the boss, to proclaim your freedom and exercise it? Of course not. The SWP are playing with words.

Needless to say, it is a large jump from the “authority” of a strikers’ assembly to that of a highly centralised “workers’ state” but that, of course, is what the SWP wish the reader to do. Comparing a strikers’ assembly and picket line — which is a form of self-managed association — with a state cannot be done. It fails to recognise the fundamental difference. In the strikers’ assembly and picket line the strikers themselves decide policy and do not delegate power away. In a state, power is delegated into the hands of a few who then use that power as they see fit. This by necessity disempowers those at the base, who are turned into mere electors and order takers. Such a situation can only spell death of a social revolution, which requires the active participation of all if it is to succeed. It also exposes the central fallacy of Marxism, namely that it claims to desire a society based on the participation of everyone yet favours a form of organisation — centralisation — that precludes that participation.

## 6. Why are the SWP’s examples of “*state functions*” wrong?

The SWP continue their diatribe against anarchism:

*“Big workers’ struggles throw up an alternative form of authority to the capitalist state. Militant mass strikes throw up workers’ councils. These are democratic bodies, like strike committees. But they take on organising ‘state functions’ — transport, food distribution, defence of picket lines and workers’ areas from the police and army, and so on.”*

To state the obvious, transportation and food distribution are not “*state functions*.” They are economic functions. Similarly, defence is not a “*state function*” as such — after all, individuals can and do defend themselves against aggression, strikers organise themselves to defend themselves against cops and hired strike breakers, and so on. This means that defence can be organised in a **libertarian** fashion, directly by those involved and based on self-managed workers’ militias and federations of free communes. It need not be the work of a state nor need it be organised in a statist (i.e. hierarchical) fashion like, for example, the current bourgeois state and military or the Bolshevik Red Army (where the election of officers, soldiers’ councils and self-governing assemblies were abolished by Trotsky in favour of officers appointed from above). So “defence” is **not** a state function.

What is a “state function” is imposing the will of a minority — the government, the boss, the bureaucrat — onto the population via professional bodies such as the police and military. This is what the Bolshevik state did, with workers’ councils turned into state bodies executing the decrees of the government and using a specialised and hierarchical army and police force to do so. The difference is important. Luigi Fabbri sums up it well:

*“The mistake of authoritarian communists in this connection is the belief that fighting and organising are impossible without submission to a government; and thus they regard anarchists ... as the foes of all organisation and all co-ordinated struggle. We, on the other hand, maintain that not only are revolutionary struggle and revolutionary organisation possible outside and in spite of government interference but that, indeed, that is the only effective way to struggle and organise, for it has the active participation of all members of the collective unit, instead of their passively entrusting themselves to the authority of the supreme leaders.*

*“Any governing body is an impediment to the real organisation of the broad masses, the majority. Where a government exists, then the only really organised people are the minority who make up the government; and ... if the masses do organise, they do so against it, outside it, or at the very least, independently of it. In ossifying into a government, the revolution as such would fall apart, on account of its awarding that government the monopoly of organisation and of the means of struggle.”* [“Anarchy and ‘Scientific’ Communism”, in **The Poverty of Statism**, pp. 13–49, Albert Meltzer (ed.), p. 27]

Thus the difference between anarchists and Leninists is not whether the organisations workers’ create in struggle will be the framework of a free society (or the basis of the Commune). Indeed, anarchists have been arguing this for longer than Marxists have. The difference is whether these organisations remain self-managed or whether they become part of a centralised state. In the words of Camillo Berneri:

*“The Marxists ... foresee the natural disappearance of the State as a consequence of the destruction of classes by the means of ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat,’ that is to say State Socialism, whereas the Anarchists desire the destruction of the classes by means of a social revolution which eliminates, with the classes, the State. The Marxists, moreover, do not propose the armed conquest of the Commune by the whole proletariat, but the propose the conquest of the State by the party which imagines that it represents the proletariat. The Anarchists allow the use of direct power by the proletariat, but they understand by the organ of this power to be formed by the entire corpus of systems of communist administration-corporate organisations [i.e. industrial unions], communal institutions, both regional and national-freely constituted outside and in opposition to all political monopoly by parties and endeavouring to a minimum administrative centralisation.”* [“Dictatorship of the Proletariat and State Socialism”, **Cienfuegos Press Anarchist Review**, no. 4, p. 52]

So, anarchists agree, in “big workers’ struggles” organisation is essential and can form an alternative to the capitalist state. However, such a framework only becomes an “authority” when power is transferred from the base into the hands of an executive committee at the top. Strike and

community assemblies, by being organs of self-management, are not an “authority” in the same sense that the state is or the boss is. Rather, they are the means by which people can manage their own struggles (and so affairs) directly, to govern themselves and so do without the need for hierarchical authority.

The SWP, in other words, confuse two very different things.

## 7. What is ironic about the SWP’s comment that workers’ councils must “*break up*” the capitalist state?

After misunderstanding basic concepts, the SWP treat us to a history lesson:

*“Such councils were a feature of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the German Revolution after the First World War, the Spanish Revolution of 1936, and many other great struggles. Socialists argue that these democratic workers’ organisations need to take power from the capitalists and break up their state.”*

Anarchists agree. Indeed, they argued that workers’ organisations should “*break up*” and replace the state long before Lenin discovered this in 1917. For example, Bakunin argued in the late 1860s that the International Workers’ Association, an “*international organisation of workers’ associations from all countries*”, would “*be able to take the revolution into its own hands*” and be “*capable of replacing this departing political world of States and bourgeoisie*.” The “*natural organisation of the masses*” was “*organisation by trade association*,” in other words, by unions, “*from the bottom up*.” The means of creating socialism would be “***emancipation through practical action ... workers’ solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means trades unions, organisation***” The very process of struggle would create the framework of a new society, a federation of workers’ councils, as “*strikes indicate a certain collective strength already, a certain understanding among the workers ... each strike becomes the point of departure for the formation of new groups*.” He stresses the International was a product of the class war as it “*has not created the war between the exploiter and the exploited; rather, the requirements of that war have created the International*.” Thus the seeds of the future society are created by the class struggle, by the needs of workers to organise themselves to resist the boss and the state. [The Basic Bakunin, p. 110, p. 139, p. 103 and p. 150]

He stressed that the revolution would be based on federations of workers’ associations, in other words, workers’ councils:

*“the federative alliance of all working men’s associations ... [will] constitute the Commune ... [the] Communal Council [will be] composed of ... delegates ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first reorganising on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation...” [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 170–2]*

And:

*“The future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom up, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in the communes, regions, nations and finally in a great federation, international and universal.” [Op. Cit., p. 206]*

Thus it is somewhat ironic to have Leninists present basic anarchist ideas as if they had thought of them first!

Then again, the ability of the Marxists to steal anarchist ideas and claim them as their own is well known. They even rewrite history to do so. For example, the SWP’s John Rees in the essay *“In Defence of October”* argues that *“since Marx’s writings on the Paris Commune”* a *“cornerstone of revolutionary theory”* was *“that the soviet is a superior form of democracy because it unifies political and economic power.”* [International Socialism, no. 52, p. 25] Nothing could be further from the truth, as Marx’s writings on the Paris Commune prove.

The Paris Commune, as Marx himself argued, was *“formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town.”* [“The Civil War in France”, **Selected Works**, p. 287] As Marx made clear, it was definitely **not** based on delegates from workplaces and so could **not** unify political and economic power. Indeed, to state that the Paris Commune was a soviet is simply a joke, as is the claim that Marxists supported soviets as revolutionary organs to smash and replace the state from 1871. In fact Marxists did not subscribe to this *“cornerstone of revolutionary theory”* until 1917 when Lenin argued that the Soviets would be the best means of ensuring a Bolshevik government.

Indeed the **only** political movement which took the position Rees falsely ascribes to Marxism was anarchism. This can be clearly seen from Bakunin’s works, a few representative quotes we have provided above. Moreover, Bakunin’s position dates, we must stress, from **before** the Paris Commune. This position has been argued by revolutionary anarchists ever since — decades before Marxists did.

Similarly, Rees argues that *“the socialist revolution must counterpose the soviet to parliament ... because it needs an organ which combines economic power — the power to strike and take control of the workplaces — with an insurrectionary bid for political power, breaking the old state.”* [Ibid.] However, he is just repeating anarchist arguments made decades before Lenin’s temporary conversion to the soviets. In the words of the anarchist Jura Federation (written in 1880):

*“The bourgeoisie’s power over the popular masses springs from economic privileges, political domination and the enshrining of such privileges in the laws. So we must strike at the wellsprings of bourgeois power, as well as its various manifestations.*

*“The following measures strike us as essential to the welfare of the revolution, every bit as much as armed struggle against its enemies:*

*“The insurgents must confiscate social capital, landed estates, mines, housing, religious and public buildings, instruments of labour, raw materials, gems and precious stones and manufactured products:*

*“All political, administrative and judicial authorities are to be abolished.*

*“... What should the organisational measures of the revolution be?*

*“Immediate and spontaneous establishment of trade bodies: provisional assumption by those of ... social capital ...: local federation of a trades bodies and labour organisation: Establishment of neighbourhood groups and federations of same ...*

*[...]*

*“[T]he federation of all the revolutionary forces of the insurgent Communes ... Federation of Communes and organisation of the masses, with an eye to the revolution’s enduring until such time as all reactionary activity has been completely eradicated.*

*[...]*

*“Once trade bodies have been have been established, the next step is to organise local life. The organ of this life is to be the federation of trades bodies and it is this local federation which is to constitute the future Commune.” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, pp. 246–7]*

As can be seen, long before Lenin’s turn towards the soviets as a means of the Bolsheviks taking power, **anarchists**, not Marxists, had argued that we must counterpose the council of workers’ delegates (by trade in the case of the Jura federation, by workplace in the case of the later anarcho-syndicalist unions, anarchist theory and the soviets). Anarchists clearly saw that, to quote Bakunin, “[n]o revolution could succeed ... today unless it was simultaneously a political and a social revolution.” [Op. Cit., p. 141] Unlike Marx, who clearly saw a political revolution (the conquest of state power) coming **before** the economic transformation of society (“*The political rule of the producer cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery. The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes and therefore of class-rule.*” [Marx, Op. Cit., p. 290]). This is why anarchists saw the social revolution in terms of economic and social organisation and action as its first steps were to eliminate both capitalism and the state.

Rees, in other words, is simply stating anarchist theory as if Marxists have been arguing the same thing since 1871!

Moreover, anarchists predicted other ideas that Marx took from the experience of the Paris Commune. Marx praised the fact that each delegate to the Commune was “*at any time revocable and bound by the **mandat impératif** (formal instructions) of his constituents ... [and so] strictly responsible agents.*” [Op. Cit., p. 288] Anarchists had held this position a number of years **before** the Commune introduced it. Proudhon was arguing in 1848 for “*universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the binding mandate. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy.*” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 63] We find Bakunin arguing exactly the same. For example, in 1868 he wrote that the “*Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade ... these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times.*” [Op. Cit., p. 155]). In addition, the similarities with the Commune’s political ideas and Proudhon’s are clear, as are the similarities between the Russian Soviets and Bakunin’s views on revolution.

So, as well as predicting the degeneration of social democracy and the Russian revolution, anarchists have also predicted such key aspects of revolutionary situations as organising on the basis of workplace and having delegates mandated and subject to instant recall. Such predictions flow

from taking part in social movements and analysing their tendencies. Moreover, a revolution is the resisting of current authorities and an act of self-liberation and so its parallels with anarchism are clear. As such the class struggle, revolutionary movements and revolutions have a libertarian basis and tendencies and, therefore, it is unsurprising that anarchist ideas have spontaneously developed in them. Thus we have a two way interaction between ideas and action. Anarchist ideas have been produced spontaneously by the class struggle due to its inherent nature as a force confronting authority and its need for self-activity and self-organisation. Anarchism has learned from that struggle and influenced it by its generalisations of previous experiences and its basis in opposing hierarchy. Anarchist predictions, therefore, come as no surprise.

Therefore, Marxists have not only been behind the class struggle itself, they have also been behind anarchism in terms of practical ideas on a social revolution and how to organise to transform society. While anarchist ideas have been confirmed by the class struggle, Marxist ones have had to be revised to bring them closer to the actual state of the struggle and to the theoretical ideas of anarchism. And the SWP have the cheek to present these ideas as if their tradition had thought of them!

Little wonder the SWP fail to present an honest account of anarchism.

## 8. How do the SWP re-write the history of the Russian Revolution?

Their history lesson continues:

*“This happened in Russia in October 1917 in a revolution led by the Bolshevik Party.”*

In reality, this did not happen. In October 1917, the Bolshevik Party took power in the name of the workers’ councils, the councils themselves did not take power. This is confirmed by Trotsky, who notes that the Bolshevik Party conference of April 1917 “*was devoted to the following fundamental question: Are we heading toward the conquest of power in the name of the socialist revolution or are we helping (anybody and everybody) to complete the democratic revolution? ... Lenin’s position was this: ... the capture of the soviet majority; the overthrow of the Provisional Government; the seizure of power through the soviets.*” Note, **through** the soviets not **by** the soviets thus indicating the fact the Party would hold the real power, not the soviets of workers’ delegates. Moreover, he states that “*to prepare the insurrection and to carry it out under cover of preparing for the Second Soviet Congress and under the slogan of defending it, was of inestimable advantage to us.*” He continued by noting that it was “*one thing to prepare an armed insurrection under the naked slogan of the seizure of power by the party, and quite another thing to prepare and then carry out an insurrection under the slogan of defending the rights of the Congress of Soviets.*” The Soviet Congress just provided “*the legal cover*” for the Bolshevik plans rather than a desire to see the Soviets actually start managing society. [The Lessons of October]

In 1920, he argued that “[w]e have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorships of the Soviets the dictatorship of the party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the ... party ... [that] the Soviets ... [became] transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this ‘substitution’ of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution



at all. *The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class.*” [Terrorism and Communism, p. 109]

In 1937 he continued this theme by arguing that *“the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard.”* Thus, rather than the working class as a whole *“seizing power”*, it is the *“vanguard”* which takes power — *“a revolutionary party, even after seizing power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.”* He mocked the anarchist idea that a socialist revolution should be based on the self-management of workers within their own autonomous class organisations:

*“Those who propose the abstraction of Soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat.”* [Stalinism and Bolshevism]

As can be seen, over a 17 year period Trotsky argued that it was the party which ruled, not the councils. The workers’ councils became little more than rubber-stamps for the Bolshevik government (and not even that, as the central government only submitted a fraction of its decrees to the Central Executive of the national soviet, and that soviet was not even in permanent session). As Russian Anarchist Voline made clear *“for, the anarchists declared, if ‘power’ really should belong to the soviets, it could not belong to the Bolshevik Party, and if it should belong to that Party, as the Bolsheviks envisaged, it could not belong to the soviets.”* [The Unknown Revolution, p. 213] In the words of Kropotkin:

*“The idea of soviets ... councils of workers and peasants ... controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part in the real production of national wealth by their own efforts.*

*“But as long as the country is governed by a party dictatorship, the workers’ and peasants’ councils evidently lose their entire significance. They are reduced to the passive rule formerly played by the ‘States General,’ when they were convoked by the king and had to combat an all-powerful royal council.”* [Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets, pp. 254–5]

In other words, the workers’ councils took power in name only. Real power rested with the central government and the workers’ councils become little more than a means to elect the government. Rather than manage society directly, the soviets simply became a transmission belt for the decrees and orders of the Bolshevik party. Hardly a system to inspire anyone.

However, the history of the Russian Revolution has two important lessons for members of the various anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist groups. Firstly, as we noted in section 1, is usually miles behind the class struggle and the ideas developed in it. As another example, we can point to the movement for workers’ control and self-management that developed around the factory committees during the summer of 1917. It was the workers themselves, **not** the Bolshevik Party, which raised the issue of workers’ self-management and control during the Russian Revolution. As historian S.A. Smith correctly summarises, the *“factory committees launched the slogan of workers’ control of production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not until May that the party began to take it up.”* [Red Petrograd, p. 154] Given that the defining aspect of capitalism

is wage labour, the Russian workers' raised a clearly socialist demand that entailed its abolition. It was the Bolshevik party, we must note, who failed to raise above a "*trade union conscious*" in this and so many other cases.

Therefore, rather than being at the forefront of struggle and ideas, the Bolsheviks were, in fact, busy trying to catch up. History has repeated itself in the anti-capitalist demonstrations. We should point out that anarchists have supported the idea of workers' self-management of production since 1840 and, unsurprisingly enough, were extremely active in the factory committee movement in 1917.

The second lesson to be gained from the Russian Revolution is that while the Bolsheviks happily (and opportunistically) took over popular slogans and introduced them into their rhetoric, they rarely meant the same thing to the Bolsheviks as they did to the masses. For example, as noted above, the Bolsheviks took up the slogan "*All Power to the Soviets*" but rather than mean that the Soviets would manage society directly they actually meant the Soviets would delegate their power to a Bolshevik government which would govern society in their name. Similarly with the term "*workers' control of production*." As S.A. Smith correctly notes, Lenin used "*the term ['workers' control'] in a very different sense from that of the factory committees*." In fact Lenin's "*proposals ... [were] thoroughly statist and centralist in character, whereas the practice of the factory committees was essentially local and autonomous*." [Op. Cit., p. 154] Once in power, the Bolsheviks systematically undermined the popular meaning of workers' control and replaced it with their own, statist conception. This ultimately resulted in the introduction of "*one-man management*" (with the manager appointed from above by the state). This process is documented in Maurice Brinton's **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, who also indicates the clear links between Bolshevik practice and Bolshevik ideology as well as how both differed from popular activity and ideas.

Hence the comments by Russian Anarchist Peter Arshinov:

*"Another no less important peculiarity is that [the] October [revolution of 1917] has two meanings — that which the working' masses who participated in the social revolution gave it, and with them the Anarchist-Communists, and that which was given it by the political party [the Marxist-Communists] that captured power from this aspiration to social revolution, and which betrayed and stifled all further development. An enormous gulf exists between these two interpretations of October. The October of the workers and peasants is the suppression of the power of the parasite classes in the name of equality and self-management. The Bolshevik October is the conquest of power by the party of the revolutionary intelligentsia, the installation of its 'State Socialism' and of its 'socialist' methods of governing the masses."* [The Two Octobers]

The members of the "anti-capitalist" movements should bear that in mind when the SWP uses the same rhetoric as they do. Appearances are always deceptive when it comes to Leninists. The history of the Russian Revolution indicates that while Leninists like the SWP can use the same words as popular movements, their interpretation of them can differ drastically.

Take, for example, the expression "anti-capitalist." The SWP will claim that they, too, are "anti-capitalist" but, in fact, they are only opposed to "free market" capitalism and actually support state capitalism. Lenin, for example, argued that workers' must "**unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour**" in April 1918 along with granting "*individual executives dictatorial*

power (or ‘unlimited’ powers)” and that “the appointment of individuals, dictators with unlimited powers” was, in fact, “in general compatible with the fundamental principles of Soviet government” simply because “the history of revolutionary movements” had “shown” that “the dictatorship of individuals was very often the expression, the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of revolutionary classes.” He notes that “[u]ndoubtedly, the dictatorship of individuals was compatible with bourgeois democracy.” [The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government, p. 34 and p. 32]

He confused state capitalism with socialism. “State capitalism,” he wrote, “is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no gaps.” [Collected Works, vol. 24, p. 259] He argued that socialism “is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. In other words, Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly **made to benefit the whole people**; by this token it ceases to be capitalist monopoly.” [The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it, p. 37]

As Peter Arshinov argued, a “fundamental fact” of the Bolshevik revolution was “that the workers and the peasant labourers remained within the earlier situation of ‘working classes’ — producers managed by authority from above.” He stressed that Bolshevik political and economic ideas may have “remov[ed] the workers from the hands of individual capitalists” but they “delivered them to the yet more rapacious hands of a single ever-present capitalist boss, the State. The relations between the workers and this new boss are the same as earlier relations between labour and capital ... Wage labour has remained what it was before, except that it has taken on the character of an obligation to the State... It is clear that in all this we are dealing with a simple substitution of State capitalism for private capitalism.” [The History of the Makhnovist Movement, p. 35 and p. 71] Therefore, looking at Bolshevism in power and in theory it is clear that it is not, in fact, “anti-capitalist” but rather in favour of state capitalism and any appropriation of popular slogans was always under the firm understanding that the Bolshevik interpretation of these ideas is what will be introduced.

Therefore the SWP’s attempt to re-write Russian History. The actual events of the Russian Revolution indicate well the authoritarian and state-capitalist nature of Leninist politics.

## 9. How do the SWP re-write the history of the Spanish Revolution?

The SWP, after re-writing Russian history, move onto Spanish history:

*“It did not happen in Spain in 1936. The C.N.T., a trade union heavily influenced by anarchist ideas, led a workers’ uprising in the city of Barcelona that year. Workers’ councils effectively ran the city.*

*“But the capitalist state machine did not simply disappear. The government and its army, which was fighting against Franco’s fascist forces, remained, although it had no authority in Barcelona.*

*“The government even offered to hand power over to the leaders of the C.N.T. But the C.N.T. believed that any form of state was wrong. It turned down the possibility of forming a workers’ state, which could have broken the fascists’ coup and the capitalist state.*

*“Worse, it accepted positions in a government that was dominated by pro-capitalist forces.*

*“That government crushed workers’ power in Barcelona, and in doing so fatally undermined the fight against fascism.”*

It is hard to know where to start with this distortion of history.

Firstly, we have to point out that the C.N.T. did lead a workers’ uprising in 1936 but it was in response to a military coup and occurred all across Spain. The army was not *“fighting against Franco’s fascist forces”* but rather had been the means by which Franco had tried to impose his version of fascism. Indeed, as the SWP know fine well, one of the first acts the CNT did in the Spanish Revolution was to organise workers’ militias to go fight the army in those parts of Spain in which the unions (particularly the CNT which lead the fighting) did not defeat it by street fighting. Thus the C.N.T. faced the might of the Spanish army rising in a fascist coup. That, as we shall see, influenced its decisions.

By not mentioning (indeed, lying about) the actual conditions the CNT faced in July 1936, the SWP ensure the reader cannot understand what happened and why the CNT made the decisions it did. Instead the reader is encouraged to think it was purely a result of anarchist theory. Needless to say, the SWP have a fit when it is suggested the actions of the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War were simply the result of Leninist ideology and unaffected by the circumstances they were made in. The logic is simple: the mistakes of Marxists are **never** their fault, **never** derive from Marxist politics and are always attributable to circumstances (regardless of the facts); the mistakes of anarchists, however, **always** derive from their politics and can never be explained by circumstances (regardless of counter-examples and those circumstances). Once this is understood, the reason why the SWP distorted the history of the Spanish Revolution becomes clear.

Secondly, anarchism does not think that the *“capitalist state machine”* will *“simply disappear.”* Rather, anarchists think that (to quote Kropotkin) the revolution *“must smash the State and replace it with the Federation [of workers’ associations and communes] and it will act accordingly.”* [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 259] In other words, the state does not disappear, it is destroyed and replaced with a new, libertarian, form of social structure. Thus the SWP misrepresents anarchist theory.

Thirdly, yes, the Catalan government did offer to stand aside for the C.N.T. and the C.N.T. rejected the offer. Why? The SWP claim that *“the C.N.T. believed that any form of state was wrong”* and that is why it did not take power. That is true, but what the SWP fail to mention is more important. The C.N.T. refused to implement libertarian communism after the defeat of the army uprising in July 1936 simply because it did not want to be isolated nor have to fight the republican government as well as the fascists (needless to say, such a decision, while understandable, was wrong). But such historical information would confuse the reader with facts and make their case against anarchism less clear-cut.

Ironically the SWP’s attack on the CNT indicates well the authoritarian basis of its politics and its support of soviets simply as a means for the party leaders to take power. After all, they obviously consider it a mistake for the *“leaders of the CNT”* to refuse power. Trotsky made the same point, arguing that:

*“A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society.”* [Stalinism and Bolshevism]

Yet the SWP say they, and their political tradition, are for “workers’ power” yet, in practice, they clearly mean that power will be seized, held and exercised by the workers’ leaders. A strange definition of “workers’ power,” we must admit but one that indicates well the differences between anarchists and Marxists. The former aim for a society based on workers’ self-management. The latter desire a society in which workers’ delegate their power to control society (i.e. their own lives) to the “leaders,” to the “workers’ party” who will govern on their behalf. The “leaders” of the CNT quite rightly rejected such this position — unfortunately they also rejected the anarchist position at the same time and decided to ignore their politics in favour of collaborating with other anti-fascist unions and parties against Franco.

Simply put, either the workers’ have the power or the leaders do. To confuse the rule of the party with workers’ self-management of society lays the basis for party dictatorship (as happened in Russia). Sadly, the SWP do exactly this and fail to learn the lessons of the Russian Revolution.

Therefore, the SWP’s argument against anarchism is logically flawed. Yes, the CNT did not take state power. However, neither did it destroy the state, as anarchist theory argues. Rather it ignored the state and this was its undoing. Thus the SWP attacks anarchism for anarchists failing to act in an anarchist manner! How strange.

One last point. The events of the Spanish Revolution are important in another way for evaluating anarchism and Marxism. Faced with the military coup, the Spanish government did nothing, even refusing to distribute arms to the workers. The workers, however, took the initiative, seized arms by direct action and took to the streets to confront the army. Indeed, the dynamic response of the CNT members to Franco’s coup compared to the inaction of the Marxist inspired German workers movement faced with Hitler’s taking of power presents us with another example of the benefits of federalism against centralism, of anarchism against Marxism. The federal structure of the CNT had accustomed its members to act for themselves, to show initiative and act without waiting for orders from the centre. The centralised German system did the opposite.

The SWP will argue, of course, that the workers were misled by their leaders (“who were only Marxists in name only”). The question then becomes: why did they not act for themselves? Perhaps because the centralised German workers’ movement had eroded their members initiative, self-reliance and spirit of revolt to such a degree that they could no longer act without their leaders instructions? It may be argued that with **better** leaders the German workers would have stopped the Nazis, but such a plea fails to understand **why** better leaders did not exist in the first place. A centralised movement inevitably produces bureaucracy and a tendency for leaders to become conservative and compromised.

All in all, rather than refute anarchism the experience of the Spanish Revolution **confirms** it. The state needs to be destroyed, **not** ignored or collaborated with, and replaced by a federation of workers’ councils organised from the bottom-up. By failing to do this, the CNT did ensure the defeat of the revolution but it hardly indicates a failure of anarchism. Rather it indicates a failure of anarchists who made the wrong decision in extremely difficult circumstances.

Obviously it is impossible to discuss the question of the C.N.T. during the Spanish Revolution in depth here. We address the issue of Marxist interpretations of Spanish Anarchist history in the appendix “*Marxism and Spanish Anarchism.*” Section 20 of that appendix discusses the C.N.T.’s decision to collaborate with the Republican State against Franco as well as its implications for anarchism.

## 10. Do anarchists ignore the fact that ideas change through struggle?

The SWP try and generalise from these experiences:

*"In different ways, the lessons of Russia and Spain are the same. The organisational questions thrown up in particular struggles are critical when it comes to the working class challenging capitalism.*

*"Workers face conflicting pressures. On the one hand, they are forced to compete in the labour market. They feel powerless, as an individual, against the boss.*

*"That is why workers can accept the bosses' view of the world. At the same time constant attacks on workers' conditions create a need for workers to unite and fight back together.*

*"These two pressures mean workers' ideas are uneven. Some see through the bosses' lies. Others can be largely taken in. Most part accept and part reject capitalist ideas. The overall consciousness of the working class is always shifting. People become involved in struggles which lead them to break with pro-capitalist ideas."*

That is very true and anarchists are well aware of it. That is why anarchists organise groups, produce propaganda, argue their ideas with others and encourage direct action and solidarity. We do so because we are aware that the ideas within society are mixed and that struggle leads people to break with pro-capitalist ideas. To quote Bakunin:

*"the germs of [socialist thought] ... [are to] be found in the instinct of every earnest worker. The goal ... is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants, to unjam within him a stream of thought corresponding to his instinct ... What impedes the swifter development of this salutary thought among the working masses? Their ignorance to be sure, that is, for the most part the political and religious prejudices with which self-interested classes still try to obscure their conscious and their natural instinct. How can we dispel this ignorance and destroy these harmful prejudices? By education and propaganda? ... they are insufficient ... [and] who will conduct this propaganda? ... [The] workers' world ... is left with but a single path, that of **emancipation through practical action** ... It means workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses. It means **trade-unions, organisation** ... To deliver [the worker] from that ignorance [of reactionary ideas], the International relies on collective experience he gains in its bosom, especially on the progress of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses ... As soon as he begins to take an active part in this wholly material struggle, ... Socialism replaces religion in his mind... through practice and collective experience ... the progressive and development of the economic struggle will bring him more and more to recognise his true enemies ... The workers thus enlisted in the struggle will necessarily ... recognise himself to be a revolutionary socialist, and he will act as one."* [The Basic Bakunin, p. 102-3]

Therefore anarchists are well aware of the importance of struggle and propaganda in winning people to anarchist ideas. No anarchist has ever argued otherwise.

## 11. Why do anarchists oppose the Leninist “revolutionary party”?

The SWP argue that:

*“So there is always a battle of ideas within the working class. That is why political organisation is crucial. Socialists seek to build a revolutionary party not only to try to spread the lessons from one struggle to another.*

*“They also want to organise those people who most clearly reject capitalism into a force that can fight for their ideas inside the working class as a whole. Such a party is democratic because its members constantly debate what is happening in today’s struggles and the lessons that can be applied from past ones.”*

That, in itself, is something most anarchists would agree with. That is why they build specific anarchist organisations which discuss and debate politics, current struggles, past struggles and revolutions and so on. In Britain there are three national anarchist federations (the Anarchist Federation, the Solidarity Federation and the Class War Federation) as well as numerous local groups and regional federations. The aim of these organisations is to try and influence the class struggle towards anarchist ideas (and, equally important, **learn** from that struggle as well — the “program of the Alliance [Bakunin’s anarchist group], expanded to keep pace with developing situations.” [Bakunin, **Bakunin on Anarchism**, p. 406]). The need for a specific political organisation is one most anarchists would agree with.

Thus few anarchists are believers in spontaneous revolution and see the need for anarchists to organise **as anarchists** to spread anarchist ideas and push the struggle towards anarchist ends (smashing the state and capitalism and the creation of a free federation of workers’ councils and communes) via anarchist tactics (direct action, solidarity, general strikes, insurrection and encouraging working class self-organisation and self-management). Hence the need for specific anarchist organisations:

*“The Alliance [Bakunin’s anarchist group] is the necessary complement to the International [the revolutionary workers’ movement]. But the International and the Alliance, while having the same ultimate aims, perform different functions. The International endeavours to unify the working masses ... regardless of nationality and national boundaries or religious and political beliefs, into one compact body; the Alliance ... tries to give these masses a really revolutionary direction. The programs of one and the other, without being opposed, differ in the degree of their revolutionary development. The International contains in germ, but only in germ, the whole program of the Alliance. The program of the Alliance represents the fullest unfolding of the International.” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 157]*

However, anarchists also argue that the revolutionary organisation must also reflect the type of society we want. Hence an anarchist federation must be self-organised from below, rejecting hierarchy and embracing self-management. For anarchists an organisation is not democratic because it debates, as the SWP claims. It is democratic only if the membership actually decides the policy of the organisation. That the SWP fail to mention this is significant and places doubt on whether their organisation is democratic in fact (as we indicate in section 22, the SWP may

debate but it is not democratic). The reason why democracy in the SWP may not be all that it should be can be found in their comment that:

*"It is also centralised, as it arrives at decisions which everyone acts on."*

However, this is not centralisation. Centralisation is when the centre decides everything and the membership follow those orders. That the membership may be in a position to elect those at the centre does not change the fact that the membership is simply expected to follow orders. It is the organisational principle of the army or police, not of a free society. That this is the principle of Leninism can be seen from Trotsky's comment that the "*statues [of the party] should express the leadership's organised distrust of the members, a distrust manifesting itself in vigilant control from above over the Party.*" [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control**, p. xi] Thus the centre controls the membership, not vice versa.

In **What is to be Done?** Lenin discussed "*the confusion of ideas concerning the meaning of democracy.*" He dismisses the idea of self-management as "*Primitive Democracy.*" He uses the example of the early British unions, where workers "*thought that it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all the members to do all the work of managing the unions; not only were all questions decided by the vote of all the members, but all the official duties were fulfilled by all the members in turn.*" He considered "*such a conception of democracy*" as "*absurd*" and saw it as historical necessity that it was replaced by "*representative institutions*" and "*full-time officials*". [**Essential Works of Lenin**, pp. 162–3] In other words, the Leninist tradition rejects self-management in favour of hierarchical structures in which power is centralised in the hands of "*full-time officials*" and "*representative institutions.*"

In contrast, Bakunin argued that trade unions which ended "*primitive democracy*" and replaced it with representative institutions became bureaucratic and "*simply left all decision-making to their committees ... In this manner power gravitated to the committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of all governments the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership.*" The membership become subject to "*the arbitrary power*" of the committees and "*ruled by oligarchs.*" In other words, bureaucracy set in and democracy as such was eliminated and while "*very good for the committees ... [it was] not at all favourable for the social, intellectual, and moral progress of the collective power*" of the workers' movement. [**Bakunin on Anarchism**, pp. 246–7] Who was correct can quickly be seen from the radical and pro-active nature of the British trade union leadership. Ironically, the SWP always bemoan trade union bureaucracies betraying workers in struggle yet promote an organisational structure that ensures that power flows to the centre and into the hands of bureaucrats.

At best, Leninism reduces "democracy" to mean that the majority designates its rulers, copied from the model of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. In practice it is drained of any real meaning and quickly becomes a veil thrown over the unlimited power of the rulers. The base does not run the organisation just because once a year it elects delegates who designate the central committee, no more than the people are sovereign in a parliamentary-type republic because they periodically elect deputies who designate the government. That the central committee is designated by a "democratically elected" congress makes no difference once it is elected, it is de facto and de jure the absolute ruler of the organisation. It has complete (statutory) control over the body of the Party (and can dissolve the base organisations, kick out militants, etc.).

Therefore it is ironic that the SWP promote themselves as supporters of democracy as it is anarchists who support the "*primitive democracy*" (self-management) contemptuously dismissed



by Lenin. With their calls for centralisation, it is clear that SWP still follow Lenin, wishing to place decision-making at the centre of the organisation, in the hands of leaders, in the same way the police, army and bureaucratic trade unions do. Anarchists reject this vision as non-socialist and instead argue for the fullest participation in decision making by those subject to those decisions. Only in this way can government — inequality in power — be eliminated from society.

Just to stress the point, anarchists are not opposed to people making decisions and everyone who took part in making the decision acting on them. Such a system is not “centralised,” however, when the decisions flow from the bottom-up and are made by mandated delegates, accountable to the people who mandated them. It is centralised when it is decided upon by the leadership and imposed upon the membership. Thus the issue is not whether we organise or not organise, nor whether we co-ordinate joint activity or not, it is a question of how we organise and co-ordinate — from the bottom up or from the top down. As Bakunin argued:

*“Discipline, mutual trust as well as unity are all excellent qualities when properly understood and practised, but disastrous when abused ... [one use of the word] discipline almost always signifies despotism on the one hand and blind automatic submission to authority on the other...”*

*“Hostile as I am to [this,] the authoritarian conception of discipline, I nevertheless recognise that a certain kind of discipline, not automatic but voluntary and intelligently understood is, and will ever be, necessary whenever a greater number of individuals undertake any kind of collective work or action. Under these circumstances, discipline is simply the voluntary and considered co-ordination of all individual efforts for a common purpose. At the moment of revolution, in the midst of the struggle, there is a natural division of functions according to the aptitude of each, assessed and judged by the collective whole...”*

*“In such a system, power, properly speaking, no longer exists. Power is diffused to the collectivity and becomes the true expression of the liberty of everyone, the faithful and sincere realisation of the will of all ... this is the only true discipline, the discipline necessary for the organisation of freedom. This is not the kind of discipline preached by the State ... which wants the old, routine-like, automatic blind discipline. Passive discipline is the foundation of every despotism.” [Bakunin on Anarchism, pp. 414–5]*

Therefore, anarchists see the need to make agreements, to stick by them and to show discipline but we argue that this must be to the agreements we helped to make and subject to our judgement. We reject “centralisation” as it confuses the necessity of agreement with hierarchical power, of solidarity and agreement from below with unity imposed from above as well as the need for discipline with following orders.

## **12. Why do the SWP make a polemical fetish of “unity” and “democracy” to the expense of common sense and freedom?**

The SWP argue that “unity” is essential:

*“Without unity around decisions there would be no democracy — minorities would simply ignore majority decisions.”*

Anarchists are in favour of free agreement and so argue that minorities should, in general, go along with the majority decisions of the groups and federations they are members of. That is, after all, the point behind federalism — to co-ordinate activity. Minorities can, after all, leave an association. As Malatesta argued, *“anarchists recognise that where life is lived in common it is often necessary for the minority to come to accept the opinion of the majority. When there is an obvious need or usefulness in doing something and, to do it requires the agreement of all, the few should feel the need adapt to the wishes of the many.”* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 100] The Spanish C.N.T. argued in its vision of Libertarian Communism that:

*“Communes are to be autonomous and will be federated at regional and national levels for the purpose of achieving goals of a general nature... communes ... will undertake to adhere to whatever general norms [that] may be majority vote after free debate... The inhabitants of a Commune are to debate their internal problems ... among themselves. Whenever problems affecting an entire comarca [district] or province are involved, it must be the Federations [of communes] who deliberate and at every reunion or assembly these may hold all of the Communes are to be represented and their delegates will relay the viewpoints previously approved in their respective Communes ... On matters of a regional nature, it will be up to the Regional Federation to put agreements into practice and these agreements will represent the sovereign will of all the region’s inhabitants. So the starting point is the individual, moving on through the Commune, to the Federation and right on up finally to the Confederation.”* [quoted by Jose Pierats, **The C.N.T. in the Spanish Revolution**, pp. 68–9]

Therefore, as a general rule-of-thumb, anarchists have little problem with the minority accepting the decisions of the majority after a process of free debate and discussion. As we argue in section A.2.11, such collective decision making is compatible with anarchist principles — indeed, is based on them. By governing ourselves directly, we exclude others governing us. However, we do not make a fetish of this, recognising that, in certain circumstances, the minority must and should ignore majority decisions. For example, if the majority of an organisation decide on a policy which the minority thinks is disastrous then why should they follow the majority? In 1914, the representatives of the German Social Democratic Party voted for war credits. The anti-war minority of that group went along with the majority in the name of “*democracy*,” “*unity*” and “*discipline*”. Would the SWP argue that they were right to do so? Similarly, if a majority of a community decided, say, that homosexuals were to be arrested, would the SWP argue that minorities must not ignore that decision? We hope not.

In general, anarchists would argue that a minority should ignore the majority when their decisions violate the fundamental ideas which the organisation or association are built on. In other words, if the majority violates the ideals of liberty, equality and solidarity then the minority can and should reject the decisions of the majority. So, a decision of the majority that violates the liberty of a non-oppressive minority — say, restricting their freedom of association — then minorities can and should ignore the decisions and practice civil disobedience to change that decision. Similarly, if a decision violates the solidarity and the feelings of equality which should inform decisions, then, again, the minority should reject the decision. We cannot accept majority decisions without question simply because the majority can be wrong. Unless the minority can judge the decisions of the majority and can reject them then they are slaves of the majority and the equality essential for a socialist society is eliminated in favour of mere obedience.

However, if the actions of the majority are simply considered to be disastrous but breaking the agreement would weaken the actions of the majority, then solidarity should be the overwhelming consideration. As Malatesta argued, “[t]here are matters over which it is worth accepting the will of the majority because the damage caused by a split would be greater than that caused by error; there are circumstances in which discipline becomes a duty because to fail in it would be to fail in the solidarity between the oppressed and would mean betrayal in face of the enemy ... What is essential is that individuals should develop a sense of organisation and solidarity, and the conviction that fraternal co-operation is necessary to fight oppression and to achieve a society in which everyone will be able to enjoy his [or her] own life.” [Life and Ideas, pp. 132–3]

He stresses the point:

*“But such an adaptation [of the minority to the decisions of the majority] on the one hand by one group must be reciprocal, voluntary and must stem from an awareness of need and of goodwill to prevent the running of social affairs from being paralysed by obstinacy. It cannot be imposed as a principle and statutory norm...”*

*“So ... anarchists deny the right of the majority to govern in human society in general ... how is it possible ... to declare that anarchists should submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be?”* [The Anarchist Revolution, pp. 100–1]

Therefore, while accepting majority decision making as a key aspect of a revolutionary movement and a free society, anarchists do not make a fetish of it. We recognise that we must use our own judgement in evaluating each decision reached simply because the majority is not always right. We must balance the need for solidarity in the common struggle and needs of common life with critical analysis and judgement.

Needless to say, our arguments apply with even more force to the decisions of the **representatives** of the majority, who are in practice a very small minority. Leninists usually try and confuse these two distinct forms of decision making. When groups like the SWP discuss majority decision making they almost always mean the decisions of those elected by the majority — the central committee or the government — rather than the majority of the masses or an organisation.

So, in practice the SWP argue that the majority of an organisation cannot be consulted on every issue and so what they actually mean is that the decisions of the central committee (or government) should be followed at all times. In other words, the decisions of a minority (the leaders) should be obeyed by the majority. A minority owns and controls the “revolutionary” organisation and “democracy” is quickly turned into its opposite. Very “democratic.”

As we shall indicate in the next two sections, the SWP do not, in fact, actually follow their own arguments. They are quite happy for minorities to ignore majority decisions — as long as the minority in question is the leadership of their own parties. As we argue in section 14, such activities flow naturally from the vanguardist politics of Leninism and should not come as a surprise.

### 13. How does the Battle of Prague expose the SWP as hypocrites?

To evaluate the sincerity of the SWP's proclaimed commitment to "democracy" and "centralism" we just have to look at the actions of their contingent at the demonstration against the WTO and IMF in Prague on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2000.

Let us recall that on September 16<sup>th</sup>, the SWP had argued as follows:

*"It is no good people coming together in a struggle, discussing what to do and then doing just what they feel like as if no discussion had taken place."*

They stressed that importance of "centralisation" which they defined as "arriv[ing] at decisions which everyone acts on. Without unity around decisions there would be no democracy — minorities would simply ignore majority decisions."

In practice, the International Socialist (IS) section of the Prague demonstration (the SWP and its sister parties) totally ignored their own arguments. Instead of ending up in the Pink sector (for which they had put themselves down) they somehow ended up behind "Ya Basta" in the yellow sector. As they were at the front of the march this should have been impossible. It turns out they deliberately entered the wrong sector because they refused to accept the agreed plan to split the march in three.

The protests had been co-ordinated by INPEG. INPEG was established as a democratic implementation of communication and co-ordination among individuals and groups which want to protest against the annual summit of IMF in Prague on September 2000. It included a variety groups — for instance reformists (e.g. NESEHNUTI), anarchists (e.g. CSAF or Solidarity) and Leninists (i.e. Socialist Solidarity, sister organisation of the British SWP). The IS group had argued at INPEG committee meetings earlier in the year for a single march on the centre (which of course could not have shut the conference down). They failed to win this argument and so had betrayed the rest of the protesters on the day by simply marching directly onto the bridge themselves (in the yellow sector) instead of continuing into the Pink sector as they were supposed to.

Why did the SWP do what they did? Presumably they put themselves down for the Pink section because it was at the front of the march and so offered the best media coverage for their placards and banners. Similarly, they joined the Yellow Section because it was marching directly to the conference centre and not, like Pink, going round to the rear and so, again, offered the best media coverage. In other words, they "*did their own thing*", ignored the agreements they made and weakened the protests simply to look the dominant group in the press. Ironically, the Czech media made sure that the Leninist parties got onto their front pages simply because many of them chose to march in Prague with red flags emblazoned with hammer and sickles. Flags associated with the Soviet occupation and the old regime are hardly "popular" and so useful to smear the protests.

The decision of the SWP to ignore the agreed plan was applauded by other Leninists. According to the post-Prague issue of the Communist Party of Great Britain's paper **Weekly Worker**:

*"Farcically, the organisers had decided to split the march into three, each with its own route and composition — blue (anarchist), pink (trade unions and left organisations) and yellow (NGOs and Jubilee 2000). Ostensibly, this started as a tactic designed to facilitate forming a human chain around the conference centre, although by the day of the*

*action this aim had, apparently, been abandoned. Whether these truly stupid arrangements had been accepted beforehand by all on the INPEG (Initiative Against Economic Globalisation) remains hazy, given the paucity of information about the debates and differences on this self-appointed body.”*

The splitting of the march into three, as a matter of fact, was a great success. It allowed the demonstrators to encircle the conference centre. The marches splitting off from the back working beautifully, catching the police and media by surprise who were clustered at the front of the march (indeed, the police later admitted that they had been caught off guard by the splitting of the march). From the splitting points to the centre the marches were unaccompanied by both police and media. A clear victory. Indeed, what would have been “*truly stupid*” was doing what the police had expected (and SWP wanted) — to have one big march.

How was the demonstration’s organised? According to eye-witness Katharine Viner (writing in **The Guardian** on Friday September 29, 2000):

*“In the run-up to Tuesday’s demonstration I attended the convergence centre, where ‘spokes council’ meetings took place, and found the sense of community and organisation there astonishing and moving. Every ‘affinity group’ — NGO or group of friends — sent a spokesperson to meetings to make decisions and work out strategy. It sounds impossible to contain, and it was laborious, but it worked and consensus was found. It felt like proper democracy in a way that the ballot box does not.”*

Julie Light, of **Corporate Watch**, indicates the same process at work in her account entitled **Spirits, Tensions Run High in Prague** (dated September 25, 2000):

*“the activist coalition called the Initiative Against Economic Globalisation (INPEG) is training hundreds of people in civil disobedience at the Convergence Centre. The Centre, a converted warehouse space located under Prague’s Libensky Bridge, serves as an information and strategy clearinghouse for the protesters. A ‘spokes council’ made up of representatives of dozens of groups makes decisions by consensus for this international ad-hoc coalition that has never worked together before. They have an elaborate system of hand signals to indicate their views as they discuss the details of the protests. Given the logistical obstacles, things seem to be running remarkably smoothly.”*

Obviously “*proper democracy*” and a council of group spokespeople discussing the protests were not good enough for the SWP and other Leninist groups. Nor, of course, making an agreement and sticking to it.

The **Weekly Worker** complements the SWP’s decision:

*“Come the march itself, the damage was partially repaired by the decision of a majority of the ‘pink’ contingent (with the SWP and its international sections to the fore) to simply veer off the agreed route. This pink section then partially merged with the yellow to advance on the conference.”*

We must point out that the International Socialist appear to have lied about the numbers they were bringing to Prague. The day before the demonstration they claimed they said they would

contribute 2,500 to the Pink section — since then their own press has reported 1,000 in their delegation (**Socialist Worker** no. 1716 stated that the “*day began when over 1,000 marched from the Florenc bus station ...led by supporters of Socialist Worker and its sister papers elsewhere in Europe*”). This would have left the Pink block seriously under strength even if they had not unilaterally left their block.

Their defection from the agreed plan had very serious repercussions on the day — one gate in the Pink sector was never covered. In the Blue sector, where the anarchists were concentrated, this meant that at the height of a battle with hundreds of riot police, a water cannon and two Armoured Personnel Carriers they were forced to send 300 people on a 2 km hike to attempt to close this gate. Shortly after they left a police charge broke the Blue Block lines leading to arrests and injuries.

Thus, by ignoring the plan and doing their own thing, they not only made a mockery of their own arguments and the decision making process of the demonstration, weakened the protest and placed others in danger.

And the net effect of their defection? As the **Weekly Worker** pathetically comments:

*“Of course, it was blocked by ranks of riot police ...”*

As the bridge was a very narrow front this resulted in a huge amount of people stuck behind “*Ya Basta!*” with nothing to do except sit around. So the “International Socialists” and other Leninists who undertook the act of sabotage with them were stuck doing nothing behind “*Ya Basta*” at the bottom of the bridge (as would be expected — indeed, this exposes another failing of centralism, its inability to know local circumstances, adapt to them and plan taking them into account). The tiny number of anarchists who marched around to cover their gate on the other hand, took the police by surprise and broke through to the conference centre until driven back by hundreds of riot police. Worse, there were some problems in the “Yellow Block” as the Leninists were pushing from behind and it took some serious explaining to get them to understand that they should stop it because otherwise people in the front line could be crushed to death. Moreover, they demanded to be allowed up alongside “*Ya Basta*” at the front, next to the riot cops, but when “*Ya Basta*” did pull out and invited the SWP to take their place in the front they refused to do so.

Moreover, the actual result of the SWP’s disgraceful actions in Prague also indicates the weakness of centralism. Having centrally decided to have one big march (regardless of what the others thought or the majority wished or agreed to) the decision was made with clearly no idea of the local geography otherwise they would have known that the front at the bridge would have been small. The net result of the “efficient” centralisation of the SWP? A mass of protestors stuck doing nothing due to a lack of understanding of local geography and the plan to blockade the conference seriously weakened. A federal organisation, on the other hand, would have had information from the local activists who would have been organising the protests and made their plans accordingly.

Therefore, to summarise. Ten days after denouncing anarchism for refusing to accept majority decisions and for being against “centralisation” (i.e. making and keeping agreements), the SWP ignore majority decisions, break agreements and do their own thing. Not only that, they weaken the demonstration and place their fellow protestors in difficulties simply so they could do nothing someplace else as, unsurprisingly enough, their way was blocked by riot cops. An amazing example of “democratic centralism” in practice and sure to inspire us all to follow the path of Marxism-Leninism!

The hypocrisy of their actions and arguments are clear. The question now arises, what do anarchists think of their action. As we argued in the last section, while anarchists favour direct democracy (self-management) when making decisions we also accept that minorities can and should ignore a majority decision if that decision is considered to be truly disastrous. However, any such decision must be made based on evaluating the damage caused by so making it and whether it would be a violation of solidarity to do so. This is what the SWP clearly failed to do. Their decision not only made a mockery of their own argument, it failed to take into account **solidarity** with the rest of the demonstration.

From an anarchist perspective, therefore, the SWP's decision and actions cannot be justified. They violated the basic principles of a revolutionary movement, the principles of liberty, equality and solidarity. They ignored the liberty of others by violating their agreements with them, they violated their equality by acting as if the other groups ideas and decisions did not matter and they violated solidarity by ignoring the needs of the common struggle and so placing their fellow demonstrators in danger. While anarchists **do** respect the rights of minorities to act as they see fit, we also recognise the importance of solidarity with our fellow workers and protestors. The SWP by failing to consider the needs of the common struggle sabotaged the demonstration and should be condemned not only as hypocrites but also as elitists — the party is not subject to the same rules as other demonstrators, whose wishes are irrelevant when they conflict with the party. The implications for the SWP's proclaimed support for democracy is clear.

So it appears that minorities **can** and **should** ignore agreements — as long as the minority in question are the leaders of the SWP and its sister parties. They have exposed themselves as being hypocrites. Like their heroes, Lenin and Trotsky, they will ignore democratic decisions when it suits them (see next section). This is sickening for numerous reasons — it placed the rest of the demonstrators in danger, it weakened the demonstration itself and it shows that the SWP say one thing and do the exact opposite. They, and the political tradition they are part of, clearly are not to be trusted. The bulk of the membership went along with this betrayal like sheep. Hardly a good example of revolutionary consciousness. In fact it shows that the “revolutionary” discipline of the SWP is like that of the cops or army) and that SWP's centralised system is based on typically bourgeois notions. In other words, the organisational structure desired by the SWP does not encourage the autonomy, initiative or critical thinking of its members (as anarchists have long argued).

Prague shows that their arguments for “centralisation” as necessary for “democracy” are hypocrisy and amount to little more than a call for domination by the SWP's leadership over the anti-capitalist movement — a call hidden begin the rhetoric of “democracy.” As can be seen, in practice the SWP happily ignores democracy when it suits them. The party always comes first, regardless of what the people it claims to represent actually want. In this they follow the actions of the Bolsheviks in power (see next section). Little wonder Marxism-Leninism is dying — the difference between what they claim and what they do is becoming increasingly well know.

## **14. Is the Leninist tradition actually as democratic as the SWP like to claim?**

While the SWP attack anarchism for being undemocratic for being against “centralism” the truth is that the Leninist tradition is fundamentally undemocratic. Those, like the SWP, who are

part of the Bolshevik tradition have no problem with minorities ignoring majority decisions — as long as the minority in question is the leadership of the vanguard party. We discussed the example of the “*battle of Prague*” in the last section, now we turn to Bolshevism in power during the Russian Revolution.

For example, the Bolsheviks usually overthrew the results of provincial soviet elections that went against them [Samuel Farber, **Before Stalinism**, pp 22–24]. It was in the spring of 1918 that the Bolsheviks showed how little they really supported the soviets. As discontent grew soviet after soviet fell to Menshevik-SR blocs. To stay in power they had to destroy the soviets and they did. Opposition victories were followed by disbanding of the soviets and often martial law. [Vladimir Brovkin, “*The Menshevik’s Political Comeback: The elections to the provincial soviets in spring 1918*”, **Russian Review** no. 42 (1983), pp. 1–50]

In addition, the Bolsheviks abolished by decree soldiers’ councils and the election of officers in the Red Army in favour of officers appointed from above (see section 11 of the appendix “*Marxism and Spanish Anarchism*” for details). They replaced self-managed factory committees with appointed, autocratic managers (see M. Brinton’s **The Bolsheviks and Workers Control** or section 17 of the appendix “*Marxism and Spanish Anarchism*” for details). All this before the start of the Russian Civil War. Similarly, Lenin and Trotsky happily replaced the democratically elected leaders of trade unions with their followers when it suited them.

As Trotsky argued in 1921, you cannot place “*the workers’ right to elect representatives above the party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship clashed with the passing moods of the workers’ democracy!*” He continued by stating the “*Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every moment on the formal principle of a workers’ democracy.*” [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control**, p. 78]

Of course, such a position follows naturally from Lenin’s theory from **What is to be Done?** that “*the working class, exclusively by their own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness ... The theory of socialism [i.e. Marxism], however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals ... the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia.*” This meant that “*Social Democratic [i.e. socialist] consciousness ... could only be brought to them from without.*” [Essential Lenin, pp. 74–5]

For Leninists, if the workers’ act in ways opposed to by the party, then the party has the right to ignore, even repress, the workers — they simply do not (indeed, cannot) understand what is required of them. They cannot reach “*socialist consciousness*” by their own efforts — indeed, their opinions can be dismissed as “*there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers in the process of their movement **the only choice is:** either bourgeois or socialist ideology ... to belittle socialist ideology **in any way**, to **deviate from it in the slightest degree** means strengthening bourgeois ideology ... the **spontaneous** development of the labour movement leads to it becoming subordinated to bourgeois ideology.*” [Op. Cit., p. 82] Given that the socialist ideology cannot be communicated without the vanguard party, this means that the **party** can ignore the wishes of the masses simply because such wishes **must be** influenced by “bourgeois” ideology. Thus Leninism contains within itself the justification for eliminating democracy within the revolution. From Lenin’s arguments to Bolshevik actions during the revolution and Trotsky’s assertions in 1921 is only a matter of time — and **power**.



In other words, the SWP's "*Battle of Ideas*" becomes, once the vanguard is in power, just a battle:

*"Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves."* [Lenin, **Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 170]

Significantly, of the 17 000 camp detainees on whom statistical information was available on 1 November 1920, peasants and workers constituted the largest groups, at 39% and 34% respectively. Similarly, of the 40 913 prisoners held in December 1921 (of whom 44% had been committed by the Cheka) nearly 84% were illiterate or minimally educated, clearly, therefore, either peasants or workers. [George Leggett, **The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police**, p. 178] Needless to say, Lenin failed to mention this aspect of his system in **The State and Revolution**, as do the SWP in their article.

It is hard to combine these facts and the SWP's comments with the claim that the "workers' state" is an instrument of class rule — after all, Lenin is acknowledging that coercion will be exercised against members of the working class as well. The question of course arises — who decides what a "wavering" or "unstable" element is? Given their comments on the role of the party and the need for the party to assume power, it will mean in practice whoever rejects the government's decisions (for example, strikers, local soviets which reject central decrees and instructions, workers who vote for anarchists or parties other than the Bolshevik party in elections to soviets, unions and so on, socialists and anarchists, etc.). Given a hierarchical system, Lenin's comment is simply a justification for state repression of its enemies (including elements within, or even the whole of, the working class).

It could be argued, however, that workers could use the soviets to recall the government. However, this fails for two reasons.

Firstly, the Leninist state will be highly centralised, with power flowing from the top-down. This means that in order to revoke the government, all the soviets in all parts of the country must, at the same time, recall their delegates and organise a national congress of soviets (which, we note, is not in permanent session). The local soviets are bound to carry out the commands of the central government (to quote the Soviet constitution of 1918 — they are to "*carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power*"). Any independence on their part would be considered "wavering" or an expression of "unstable" natures and so subject to "*revolutionary coercion*". In a highly centralised system, the means of accountability is reduced to the usual bourgeois level — vote in the general election every few years (which, in any case, can be annulled by the government if it dislikes the "*passing moods*" expressed by them). As can be seen above, the Bolsheviks did disband soviets when they considered the wrong (i.e. "wavering" or "unstable") elements had been elected to them and so a highly centralised state system cannot be responsive to real control from below.

Secondly, "*revolutionary coercion*" against "wavering" elements does not happen in isolation. It will encourage critical workers to keep quiet in case they, too, are deemed "unstable" and become subject to "*revolutionary*" coercion. As a government policy it can have no other effect than deterring democracy.

Thus Leninist politics provides the rationale for eliminating even the limited role of soviets for electing the government they hold in that ideology. The Leninist conception of workers' councils is purely instrumental. In 1907, Lenin argued that:

*“the Party ... has never renounced its intention of utilising certain non-party organisations, such as the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies ... to extend Social-Democratic influence among the working class and to strengthen the Social-Democratic labour movement ... the incipient revival creates the opportunity to organise or utilise non-party working-class institutions, such as Soviets ... for the purpose of developing the Social-Democratic movement; at the same time the Social-Democratic Party organisations must bear in mind if Social-Democratic activities among the proletarian masses are properly, effectively and widely organised, such institutions may actually become superfluous.”* [Marx, Engels and Lenin, **Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism**, pp. 209–10]

As can be seen from the experiences of Russia under Lenin, this perspective did not fundamentally change — given a conflict between the councils and the party, the party always came first and soviets simply superfluous.

## 15. Why is the SWP’s support for centralisation anti-socialist?

The SWP continue:

*“Centralism is needed above all because the capitalist state is centralised. The police, media moguls, employers, the state bureaucracy and governments act in a concerted way to protect the system.”*

Very true. However, the SWP fail to analyse **why** the state is centralised. Simply put, the state is centralised to **facilitate minority rule** by excluding the mass of people from taking part in the decision making processes within society. This is to be expected as social structures do not evolve by chance — rather they develop to meet specific needs and requirements. The specific need of the ruling class is to rule and that means marginalising the bulk of the population. Its requirement is for minority power and this is transformed into the structure of the state and capitalist company. The SWP assume that centralisation is simply a tool without content. Rather, it is a tool that has been fashioned to do a specific job, namely to exclude the bulk of the population from the decision making process. It is designed that way and can have no other result. For that reason anarchists reject centralisation. As the justly famous Sonvillier Circular argued: *“How could one expect an egalitarian society to emerge out of an authoritarian organisation? It is impossible.”* [quoted by Brian Morris, **Bakunin: The Philosophy of Freedom**, p. 61]

Thus Rudolf Rocker:

*“For the state centralisation is the appropriate form of organisation, since it aims at the greatest possible uniformity in social life for the maintenance of political and social equilibrium. But for a movement whose very existence depends on prompt action at any favourable moment and on the independent thought and action of its supporters, centralism could but be a curse by weakening its power of decision and systematically*

*repressing all immediate action. If, for example, as was the case in Germany, every local strike had first to be approved by the Central, which was often hundreds of miles away and was not usually in a position to pass a correct judgement on the local conditions, one cannot wonder that the inertia of the apparatus of organisation renders a quick attack quite impossible, and there thus arises a state of affairs where the energetic and intellectually alert groups no longer serve as patterns for the less active, but are condemned by these to inactivity, inevitably bringing the whole movement to stagnation. Organisation is, after all, only a means to an end. When it becomes an end in itself, it kills the spirit and the vital initiative of its members and sets up that domination by mediocrity which is the characteristic of all bureaucracies.” [Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 54]*

Just as the capitalist state cannot be utilised by the working class for its own ends, capitalist/statist organisational principles such as appointment, autocratic management, centralisation and delegation of power and so on cannot be utilised for social liberation. They are not designed to be used for that purpose (and, indeed, they were developed in the first place to stop it and enforce minority rule!).

The implication of the SWP’s argument is that centralisation is required for co-ordinated activity. Anarchists disagree. Yes, there is a need for co-ordination and joint activity, but that must be created from below, in new ways that reflect the goals we are aiming for. During the Spanish Revolution anarchists organised militias to fight the fascists. One was lead by anarchist militant Durruti. His military adviser, Pérez Farras, a professional soldier, was concerned about the application of libertarian principles to military organisation. Durruti replied:

*“I have already said and I repeat; during all my life, I have acted as an anarchist. The fact of having been given political responsibility for a human collective cannot change my convictions. It is under these conditions that I agreed to play the role given to me by the Central Committee of the Militias.*

*“I thought — and what has happened confirms my belief — that a workingmen’s militia cannot be led according to the same rules as an army. I think that discipline, co-ordination and the fulfilment of a plan are indispensable. But this idea can no longer be understood in the terms of the world we have just destroyed. We have new ideas. We think that solidarity among men must awaken personal responsibility, which knows how to accept discipline as an autonomous act.*

*“Necessity imposes a war on us, a struggle that differs from many of those that we have carried on before. But the goal of our struggle is always the triumph of the revolution. This means not only victory over the enemy, but also a radical change in man. For this change to occur, man must learn to live in freedom and develop in himself his potentialities as a responsible individual. The worker in the factory, using his tools and directing production, is bringing about a change in himself. The fighter, like the worker, uses his gun as a tool and his acts must lead to the same goals as those of the worker.*

*“In the struggle he cannot act like a soldier under orders but like a man who is conscious of what he is doing. I know it is not easy to get such a result, but what one cannot get by reason, one can never get through force. If our revolutionary army must be maintained*

*through fear, we will have changed nothing but the colour of fear. It is only by freeing itself from fear that a free society can be built.” [quoted by Abel Paz, Durruti: The People Armed, p. 224]*

Durruti’s words effectively refute the SWP’s flawed argument. We need to organise, co-ordinate, co-operate our activities but we cannot do so in bourgeois ways. We need to discover new ways, based on libertarian ideas and not capitalist ones like centralisation.

Indeed, this conflict between the Leninist support for traditional forms of organisational structure and the new forms produced by workers in struggle came into conflict during the Russian Revolution. One such area of conflict was the factory committee movement and its attempts at workers’ self-management of production. As historian A.S. Smith summarises:

*“Implicit in the movement for workers’ control was a belief that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In their battle to democratise the factory, in their emphasis on the importance of collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming the work situation, the factory committees had become aware — in a partial and groping way, to be sure — that factories are not merely sites of production, but also of reproduction — the reproduction of a certain structure of social relations based on the division between those who give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and those who execute ... inscribed within their practice was a distinctive vision of socialism, central to which was workplace democracy.*

*“Lenin believed that socialism could be built only on the basis of large-scale industry as developed by capitalism, with its specific types of productivity and social organisation of labour. Thus for him, capitalist methods of labour-discipline or one-man management were not necessarily incompatible with socialism. Indeed, he went so far as to consider them to be inherently progressive, failing to recognise that such methods undermined workers’ initiative at the point of production. This was because Lenin believed that the transition to socialism was guaranteed, ultimately, not by the self-activity of workers, but by the ‘proletarian’ character of state power... There is no doubt that Lenin did conceive proletarian power in terms of the central state and lacked a conception of localising such power at the point of production.” [Red Petrograd, pp. 261–2]*

The outcome of this struggle was the victory of the Bolshevik vision (as it had state power to enforce it) and the imposition of apparently “efficient” capitalist methods of organisation. However, the net effect of using (or, more correctly, imposing) capitalist organisations was, unsurprisingly, the re-introduction of capitalist social relations. Little wonder the Russian Revolution quickly became just another form of capitalism — **state** capitalism where the state appointed manager replaced the boss and the workers’ position remained identical. Lenin’s attempts to centralise production simply replaced workers’ power at the point of production with that of state bureaucrats.

We must point out the central fallacy of the SWP’s argument. Essentially they are arguing you need to fight fire with fire. They argue that the capitalist class is centralised and so, in order to defeat them, so must we. Unfortunately for the SWP, you do not put a fire out with fire, you put fire out with water. Therefore, to defeat centralised system you need decentralised social organisation. Such decentralisation is required to include the bulk of the population in the revolutionary struggle and does not imply isolation. A decentralised movement does not preclude

co-ordination or co-operation but that co-ordination must come from below, based on federal structures, and not imposed from above.

So a key difference between anarchism and Marxism on how the movement against capitalism should organise in the here and now. Anarchists argue that it should prefigure the society we desire — namely it should be self-managed, decentralised, built and organised from the bottom-up in a federal structure. This perspective can be seen from the justly famous Sonvillier Circular:

*“The future society should be nothing but a universalisation of the organisation which the International will establish for itself. We must therefore take care to bring this organisation as near as possible to our ideal ... How could one expect an egalitarian and free society to grow out of an authoritarian organisation? That is impossible. The International, embryo of the future human society, must be, from now on, the faithful image of our principles of liberty and federation.”* [quoted by Marx, **Fictitious Splits in the International**]

Of course, Marx replied to this argument and, in so doing, misrepresented the anarchist position. He argued that the Paris Communards “*would not have failed if they had understood that the Commune was ‘the embryo of the future human society’ and had cast away all discipline and all arms — that is, the things which must disappear when there are no more wars!*” [Ibid.] Needless to say this is simply a slander on the anarchist position. Anarchists, as the Circular makes clear, recognise that we cannot totally reflect the future and so the current movement can only be “*as near as possible to our ideal.*” Thus we have to do things, such as fighting the bosses, rising in insurrection, smashing the state or defending a revolution, which we would not have to do in a socialist society but that does not imply we should not try and organise in a socialist way in the here and now. Such common sense, unfortunately, is lacking in Marx who instead decided to utter nonsense for a cheap polemical point.

Therefore, if we want a revolution which is more than just a change in who the boss is, we must create new forms of organisation and struggle which do not reproduce the traits of the world we are fighting. To put out the fire of class society, we need the water of a classless society and so we should organise in a libertarian way, building the new world in the shell of the old.

## 16. Why is the SWP wrong about the A16 Washington D.C. demo?

As an example of why Marxism is better than anarchism they give an example:

*“Protesters put up several roadblocks during the major anti-capitalist demonstration in Washington in April of this year. The police tried to clear them. The question arose of what the protesters should do.*

*“Some wanted to try to maintain the roadblocks. Others thought the best tactic was to reorganise the protests into one demonstration. Instead of coming to a clear decision and acting on it, the key organiser of the whole event told people at each roadblock to do what they thought was right.*

*“The resulting confusion weakened all the protests.”*

Firstly, we must point out that this argument is somewhat ironic coming from a party that ignored the agreed plan during the Prague anti-WTO demonstration and did “*what they thought was right*” (see section 13). Indeed, the various anti-capitalist demonstrations have been extremely effective and have been organised in an **anarchist** manner thus refuting the SWP.

Secondly, unfortunately for the SWP, they have the facts all wrong. The World Bank/IMF complex in Washington DC was extremely difficult to blockade. The police blocked over 50 blocks on the day of the demonstration to travel. DC has very wide streets. Many World Bank and IMF Delegates spent the night in those buildings, or came in early in the morning long before sunrise. This calls into question whether a blockade was the best strategy considering the logistic details involved (the Blockade strategy was abandoned for the Republican and Democratic Party Conference demonstrations). In addition to the blockades, there was an officially permitted rally blocks away from the action.

The tactical process worked in practice like this. While there was an original plan agreed to by consensus at the beginning of the blockades by all affinity groups, with groups picking which intersection to occupy and which tactics to use, there was a great deal of flexibility as well. There were several flying columns that moved from intersection to intersection reinforcing barricades and increasing numbers where it looked like police might charge. The largest of these was the Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist Bloc (“*the Black Bloc*”) made up mostly of class-struggle anarchists but included a number of other left libertarians (such as council communists and autonomists). The RACB officially maintained its autonomy within the demonstration and worked with others when and where it could. The affinity groups of the RACB would come to quick decisions on what to do. Often, they would quickly respond to the situation; usually their appearance was enough for the cops to fall back after a few tense moments.

By early afternoon, the various affinity groups manning the blockades were informed that the blockades had failed, and enough delegates had made it inside that the meeting was continuing inside with only a short delay. So the question came of what to do next? There were varying opinions. Some affinity groups favoured maintaining their blockades symbolically as an act of defiance and hoping to slow the dispersion of World Bank/IMF representatives as they left the meeting. Others wished to have a victory march around the area. Others wanted to join the rally. Some wanted to march on the World Bank and try for an occupation. There was no consensus. After much discussion between the affinity groups, a decision was reached.

The RACB was divided between two choices — either join with the rally or march on the Bank. There was a lot of negotiation back and forth between affinity groups. A compromise was reached. The RACB would move to each blockade in order and provide cover for those locked down to unlock and safely merge with the growing march so that attempts could be made the next day do blockade. The march continued to swell as it made its way along the route, eventually merging with the crowd at the permitted demonstration.

A decision was made. Perhaps it wasn’t the most militant. Perhaps it did not foresee that the next day would lack the numbers to even attempt a successful blockade. But arrests on the demonstration were kept to a minimum, a large show of strength was put on and strong feelings of solidarity and camaraderie grew. The cops could only control a few square blocks, the rest of the city was ours. And it was a decision that everyone had a part in making, and one that everyone could live with. It’s called self-management, perhaps it isn’t always the fastest method of making decisions, but it is the best one if you desire freedom.

Of course, the last thing the SWP would want to admit is that anarchists led the victory march around Washington D.C. without a permit, without marshals, without many arrests and a minimal amount of violence! Of all the recent demonstrations in the U.S. the black bloc was the largest and most well received at Washington. Moreover, that demonstration showed that decentralised, federal organisation worked in practice. Each affinity group participated in the decision making process and an agreement reached between all involved. Centralisation was not required, no centre imposed the decision. Rather than weaken the protests, decentralisation strengthened it by involving all in the decision making process. Little wonder the SWP re-wrote history.

## 17. Why does the SWP's Washington example refute the SWP's own argument and not anarchism?

However, let us assume that the SWP's fictional account of the A16 demonstration (see last section) was, in fact, true. What does it actually mean? We must point out its interesting logic. They argue that the protests had a "key organiser" which means they were centralised. They argue that the protestors looked to that person for direction. Unfortunately that person could not come to a "clear decision" and instead handed back decision making to each roadblock. In other words, centralisation failed, not federalism. Moreover, the state would have had a simple means to destroy the demonstration — arrest the "key organiser." In a centralised system, without a centre, the whole structure collapses — without someone giving orders, nothing is done.

In a federal structure each roadblock would have sent a delegate to a council to co-ordinate struggle (which, we stress, was what actually did happen). To quote Bakunin, "*there will be a federation of the standing barricades and a Revolutionary Communal Council will operate on the basis of one or two delegates from each barricade ... these deputies being invested with binding mandates and accountable and revocable at all times.*" [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 155] In the SWP's version of history, the blockades did not do this and so, unsurprisingly, without organisation, there was confusion. As an argument against anarchism it is useless. So the SWP's fictional example is an argument against centralisation — of placing decision-making power at the centre. In their story, faced with the task of co-ordinating actions which they had no knowledge of, the "key organiser" could not act and by not having a federal structure, the roadblocks were weakened due to lack of co-ordination. In reality, a federal structure existed within the demonstration, each roadblock and affinity group could take effective action instantly to counter the police, without waiting for instructions from the centre, as well as communicate what has happening to other roadblocks and come to common agreements on what action to take. The Washington demonstration — like the other anti-capitalist demonstrations — showed the effectiveness of anarchist principles, of decentralisation and federalism from the bottom up.

So the SWP's analysis of the Washington demonstration is faulty on two levels. Firstly, their account is not accurate. The demonstration was organised in a decentralised manner and worked extremely well. Secondly, even if their account was not fiction, it proves the failure of centralisation, not federalism.

They draw a lesson from their fictional account:

*"The police, needless to say, did not 'decentralise' their decision making. They co-ordinated across the city to break the protests."*

Such an analogy indicates the bourgeois and authoritarian nature of the SWP's politics. They do not understand that the capitalist state and workplace is centralised for a reason. It is to concentrate power into the hands of a few, with the many reduced to mere order takers. It is the means by which bourgeois rule is enforced

Moreover, they seem to be arguing that if we followed the example of the bourgeois state, of the organisational structure of the police or the army, then we would be as "effective" as they are. They are, in effect, arguing that the anti-capitalist movement should reproduce the regulated docility of the police force into its ranks, reproduce the domination of a few bosses at the top over a mass of unquestioning automations at the bottom. As Murray Bookchin argued, the Leninist *"has always had a grudging admiration and respect for that most inhuman of all hierarchical institutions, the military."* [Toward an Ecological Society, p. 254f] The SWP prove him right.

## 18. Why is a "revolutionary party" a contradiction in terms?

They continue by arguing that *"Anarchists say a revolutionary party is at best unnecessary and at worst another form of authoritarianism. But they cannot avoid the problems that a revolutionary party addresses."* In reality, while anarchists reject the "revolutionary" party, they do not reject the need for an anarchist federation to spread anarchist ideas, convince others of our ideas and to give a lead during struggles. We reject the Bolshevik style "revolutionary party" simply because it is organised in a centralised, bourgeois, fashion and so produces all the problems of capitalist society within so-called revolutionary organisations. As the anarchists of Trotwatch explain, such a party leaves much to be desired:

*"In reality, a Leninist Party simply reproduces and institutionalises existing capitalist power relations inside a supposedly 'revolutionary' organisation: between leaders and led; order givers and order takers; between specialists and the acquiescent and largely powerless party workers. And that elitist power relation is extended to include the relationship between the party and class."* [Carry on Recruiting!, p. 41]

Such an organisation can never create a socialist society. In contrast, anarchists argue that socialist organisations should reflect as much as possible the future society we are aiming to create. To build organisations which are statist/capitalistic in structure cannot do other than reproduce the very problems of capitalism/statism into them and so undermine their liberatory potential. As Murray Bookchin puts it:

*"The 'glorious party,' when there is one, almost invariably lags behind the events ... In the beginning ... it tends to have an inhibitory function, not a 'vanguard' role. Where it exercises influence, it tends to slow down the flow of events, not 'co-ordinate' the revolutionary forced. This is not accidental. The party is structured along hierarchical lines that reflect the very society it professes to oppose ... Its membership is schooled in obedience ... The party's leadership, in turn, is schooled in habits born of command, authority, manipulation ... Its leaders ... lose contact with the living situation below. The local groups, which know their own immediate situation better than any remote leaders, are obliged to subordinate their insights to directives from above. The leadership, lacking any direct knowledge of local problems, responds sluggishly and prudently..."*



*“The party becomes less efficient from a revolutionary point of view the more it seeks efficiency by means of hierarchy, cadres and centralisation. Although everyone marches in step, the orders are usually wrong, especially when events begin to move rapidly and take unexpected turns—as they do in all revolutions. The party is efficient in only one respect—in moulding society in its own hierarchical image if the revolution is successful. It recreates bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the bureaucracy, centralisation and the state. It fosters the very social conditions which justify this kind of society. Hence, instead of ‘withering away,’ the state controlled by the ‘glorious party’ preserves the very conditions which ‘necessitate’ the existence of a state — and a party to ‘guard’ it.*

*“On the other hand, this kind of party is extremely vulnerable in periods of repression. The bourgeoisie has only to grab its leadership to destroy virtually the entire movement. With its leaders in prison or in hiding, the party becomes paralysed; the obedient membership had no one to obey and tends to flounder ...*

*“[T]he Bolshevik leadership was ordinarily extremely conservative, a trait that Lenin had to fight throughout 1917 — first in his efforts to reorient the Central Committee against the provisional government (the famous conflict over the ‘April Theses’), later in driving the Central Committee toward insurrection in October. In both cases he threatened to resign from the Central Committee and bring his views to ‘the lower ranks of the party.’” [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, pp. 194–9]*

Thus the example of the “successful” Russian Revolution indicates the weakness of Leninism — Lenin had to fight the party machine he helped create in order to get it do anything revolutionary. Hardly a good example of a “revolutionary” party.

But, then again, the SWP know that anarchists do not reject the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists to influence the class struggle. As they argue, *“Anarchism’s attempts to deal with them have been far less effective and less democratic.”* The question is not of one of **whether** revolutionaries should organise together but **how** they do this. And as we shall see in the next four sections, the SWP’s examples of revolutionary anarchist organisations are either unique and so cannot be generalised from (Bakunin’s ideas on revolutionary organisation), or false (the F.A.I. was **not** organised in the way the SWP claim). Indeed, the simple fact is that the SWP **ignore** the usual ways anarchists organise as anarchists and yet try and draw conclusions about anarchism from their faulty examples.

## 19. Do anarchists operate *“in secret”*?

They continue:

*“All the major anarchist organisations in history have been centralised but have operated in secret.”*

It is just as well they say *“all the major anarchist organisations,”* it allows them to ignore counter-examples. We can point to hundreds of anarchist organisations that are/were not secret. For example, the Italian Anarchist Union (IAU) was a non-secret organisation. Given that the IAU

had around 20 000 members in 1920, we wonder by what criteria the SWP excludes it from being a “*major anarchist organisation*”? After all, estimates of the membership of the F.A.I. (one of the SWP’s two “*major*” anarchist organisations) vary from around 6 000 to around 30 000. Bakunin’s “Alliance” (the other SWP example) amounted to, at most, under 100. In terms of size, the IAU was equal to the F.A.I. and outnumbered the “Alliance” considerably. Why was the UAI not a “*major anarchist organisation*”?

Another, more up to date, example is the French Anarchist Federation which organises today. It has a weekly paper and groups all across France as well as in Belgium. That is not secret and is one of the largest anarchist organisations existing today (and so, by anyone’s standards “*a major anarchist organisation*”). We wonder why the SWP excludes it? Simply because they know their generalisation is false?

Therefore, as can be seen, the SWP’s claim is simply a lie. Few anarchist organisations have been secret. Those that have been secret have done so when conditions demanded it (for example, during periods of repression and when operating in countries with authoritarian governments). Just as Marxist organisations have done. For example, the Bolsheviks were secret for great periods of time under Tsarism and, ironically enough, the Trotskyist-Zinovievist **United Opposition** had to resort to secret and conspiratorial organisation to reach the Russian Communist Party rank and file in the 1920s. Therefore, to claim that anarchists have some sort of monopoly of secret organising is simply a lie — Marxists, like anarchists, have sometimes organised in secret when they have been forced to by state repression or likelihood of state repression. It is not a principle but, rather, sometimes a necessity. As anyone with even a basic grasp of anarchist history would know.

Similarly for the SWP’s claims that “*all the major anarchist organisations in history have been centralised.*” Such a claim is also a lie, as we shall prove in the sections 20 and 22.

## 20. Why is the SWP wrong about Bakunin’s organisation?

As an example of a “*major anarchist organisation*” the SWP point to Bakunin and the organisations he created:

*“The 19<sup>th</sup> century theorist of anarchism Mikhail Bakunin’s organisation had a hierarchy of committees, with half a dozen people at the top, which were not under the democratic control of its members.”*

Firstly, we have to wonder why anyone would have wanted to join Bakunin’s group if they had no say in the organisation. Also, given that communication in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was extremely slow, such an organisation would have spent most of its time waiting for instructions from above. Why would anyone want to join such a group? Simple logic undermines the SWP’s argument.

Secondly, we should also point out that the Bolshevik party itself was a secret organisation for most of its life in Tsarist Russia. Bakunin, an exile from that society, would have been aware, like the Bolsheviks, of the necessity of secret organising. Moreover, having spent a number of years imprisoned by the Tsar, Bakunin would not have desired to end up **back** in prison after escaping from Siberia to the West. In addition, given that the countries in which anarchists were operating at the time were not democracies, in the main, a secret organisation would have been considered essential. As Murray Bookchin argues, “*Bakunin’s emphasis on conspiracy and secrecy*

can be understood only against the social background of Italy, Spain, and Russia the three countries in Europe where conspiracy and secrecy were matters of sheer survival.” [The Spanish Anarchists, p. 24] The SWP ignore the historical context.

Thirdly, the reality of Bakunin’s organisation is slightly different from the SWP’s claims. We have discussed this issue in great detail in section J.3.7 of the FAQ. However, it is useful to indicate the type of organisation Bakunin thought was necessary to aid the revolution. If we do, it soon becomes clear that the SWP’s claim that it was “*not under the democratic control of its members*” is not true. To do so we shall quote from his letter to the Russian Nihilist Sergy Nechayev in which he explains the differences in their ideas. He discusses the “*principles and mutual conditions*” for a “*new society*” of revolutionaries in Russia (noting that this was an “*outline of a plan*” which “*must be developed, supplemented, and sometimes altered according to circumstances*”):

*“Equality among all members and the unconditional and absolute solidarity — one for all and all for one — with the obligation for each and everyone to help each other, support and save each other...”*

*“Complete frankness among members and proscription of any Jesuitical methods in their relationships ... When a member has to say anything against another member, this must be done at a general meeting and in his presence. **General fraternal control** of each other ...*

*“Everyone’s personal intelligence vanished like a river in the sea in the collective intelligence and all members obey unconditionally the decisions of the latter.*

*“All members are equal; they know all their comrades and discuss and decide with them all the most important and essential questions bearing on the programme of the society and the progress of the cause. The decision of the general meeting is absolute law...”*

*“The society chooses an Executive Committee from among their number consisting of three or five members who should organise the branches of the society and manage its activities in all the regions of the [Russian] Empire on the basis of the programme and general plan of action adopted by the decision of the society as a whole...”*

*“This Committee is elected for an indefinite term. If the society ... the People’s Fraternity is satisfied with the actions of the Committee, it will be left as such; and while it remains a Committee each member ... and each regional group have to obey it unconditionally, except in such cases where the orders of the Committee contradict either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all ... have participated equally in the discussion of them...”*

*“In such a case members of the group must halt the execution of the Committee’s orders and call the Committee to judgement before the general meeting ... If the general meeting is discontented with the Committee, it can always substitute another one for it...”*

*“Any member or any group is subject to judgement by the general meeting ...*

*“No new Brother can be accepted without the consent of all or at the very least three-quarters of all the members...”*

*“The Committee divides the members ... among the Regions and constitutes Regional groups of leaderships from them ... Regional leadership is charged with organising the*

*second tier of the society — the **Regional Fraternity**, on the basis of the same programme, the same rules, and the same revolutionary plan...*

*“All members of the **Regional Fraternity** know each other, but do not know of the existence of the **People’s Fraternity**. They only know that there exists a **Central Committee** which hands down to them their orders for execution through **Regional Committee** which has been set up by it, i.e. by the **Central Committee** ...*

*“Each Regional Committee will set up **District Committees** from members of the **Regional Fraternity** and will appoint and replace them...*

*“District Committees can, if necessary and only with the consent of the Regional Committee, set up a third tier of the organisation — **District Fraternity** with a programme and regulations as near as possible to the general programme and regulations of the People’s Fraternity. The programme and regulations of the District Fraternity will not come into force until they are discussed and passed by the general meeting of the Regional Fraternity and have been confirmed by the Regional Committee...*

*“Jesuitical control ... are totally excluded from all three tiers of the secret organisation ... The strength of the whole society, as well as the morality, loyalty, energy and dedication of each member, is based exclusively and totally on the shared truth, sincerity and trust, and on the open fraternal control of all over each one.” [cited by Michael Confino, **Daughter of a Revolutionary**, pp. 264–6]*

As can be seen, while there is much in Bakunin’s ideas that few anarchists would agree to, it cannot be said that it was **not** under the “*democratic control of its members*.” The system of committees is hardly libertarian but neither is it the top-down dictatorship the SWP argue it was. For example, the central committee was chosen by the “*general meeting*” of the members, which also decided upon the “*programme of the society and the progress of the cause*.” Its “*decision*” was “*absolute law*” and the central committee could be replaced by it. Moreover, the membership could ignore the decisions of the central committee if it “*contradict[ed] either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all ... have participated equally in the discussion of them*.” Each tier of the organisation had the same “*programme and regulations*.” Anarchists today would agree that Bakunin’s plan was extremely flawed. The appointment of committees from above is hardly libertarian, even given that each tier had the same “*regulations*” and so general meetings of each Fraternity, for example. However, the SWP’s summary of Bakunin’s ideas, as can be seen, is flawed.

Given that no other anarchist group or federation operated in this way, it is hard to generalise from Bakunin’s flawed ideas on organisation to a conclusion about anarchism. But, of course, this is what the SWP do — and such a generalisation is simply a lie. The example of the F.A.I., the SWP’s other example, indicates how most anarchist organisations work in practice — namely, a decentralised federation of autonomous groups (see section 22).

Moreover, as we will indicate in the next section, the SWP have little reason to attack Bakunin’s ideas. This is because Lenin had similar (although not identical) ones on the question of organising revolutionaries in Tsarist Russia and because the SWP are renown for their leadership being secretive, centralised, bureaucratic and top-down.

In summary, anarchists agree with the SWP that Bakunin’s ideas are not to be recommended while pointing out that the likes of the SWP fail to provide an accurate account of their internal

workings (i.e. they were more democratic than the SWP suggest), the role Bakunin saw for them in the labour movement and revolution or the historical context in which they were shaped. Moreover, we also argue that their comments against Bakunin, ironically, apply with equal force to their own party which is renowned, like all Bolshevik-style parties, as being undemocratic, top-down and authoritarian. We turn to this issue in the next section.

## 21. Why is the SWP's attack on Bakunin's organisation ironic?

That the SWP attack Bakunin's organisational schema (see last section) is somewhat ironic. After all, the Bolshevik party system had many of the features of Bakunin's organisational plan. If Bakunin, quite rightly, should be attacked for certain aspects of these ideas, then so must Bolshevik parties like the SWP.

For example, Lenin argued in favour of centralisation and secrecy in his work **What is to be Done?**. In this work he argued as follows:

*"The active and widespread participation of the masses will not suffer; on the contrary, it will benefit by the fact that a 'dozen' experienced revolutionaries, no less professionally trained than the police, will centralise all the secret side of the work — prepare leaflets, work out approximate plans and **appoint bodies of leaders** for each urban district, for each factory district and for each educational institution, etc. [our emphasis] (I know that exception will be taken to my 'undemocratic' views, but I shall reply to this altogether unintelligent objection later on.) The centralisation of the most secret functions in an organisation of revolutionaries will not diminish, but rather increase the extent and the quality of the activity of a large number of other organisations that are intended for wide membership and which, therefore, can be as loose and as public as possible, such as trade unions; workers' circles for self-education and the reading illegal literature, and socialist and also democratic, circles for **all other sections of the population**, etc., etc. We must have **as large a number as possible** of such organisations having the widest possible variety of functions, but it would be absurd and dangerous **to confuse them with the organisation of revolutionaries**, to erase the line of demarcation between them, to make still more the masses' already incredibly hazy appreciation of the fact that in order to 'serve' the mass movement we must have people who will devote themselves exclusively to Social-Democratic activities, and that such people must **train themselves patiently and steadfastly to be professional revolutionaries**." [The Essential Lenin, p. 149]*

And:

*"The only serious organisational principle the active workers of our movement can accept is **strict secrecy, strict selection of members**, and the training of professional revolutionaries. If we possessed these qualities, something even more than 'democratism' would be guaranteed to us, namely, complete, comradely, mutual confidence among revolutionaries. And this is absolutely essential for us, because in Russia it is useless thinking that democratic control can substitute for it." [our emphasis, Op. Cit., p. 162]*

Thus we have Lenin advocating “*strict secrecy, strict selection of members*” as well as a centralised party which will “*appoint bodies of leaders for each urban district, for each factory district and for each educational institution.*” The parallels with Bakunin’s system are clear and are predominately the result of the identical political conditions both revolutionaries experienced. While anarchists are happy to indicate and oppose the non-libertarian aspects of Bakunin’s ideas, it is hard for the likes of the SWP to attack Bakunin while embracing Lenin’s ideas on the party, justifying their more “un-democratic” aspects as a result of the objective conditions of Tsarism.

Similar top-down perspectives can be seen from Bolshevism in Power. The 1918 constitution of the Soviet Union argued that local soviets were to “*carry out all orders of the respective higher organs of the soviet power.*” In 1919, the Bolshevik’s Eighth Party Congress strengthened party discipline. As Maurice Brinton notes, the “*Congress ruled that each decision must above all be fulfilled. Only after this is an appeal to the corresponding Party organ permissible.*” [The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control, p. 55] He quotes the resolution:

*“The whole matter of posting of Party workers is in the hands of the Central Committee. Its decisions are binding for everyone.”* [Op. Cit., pp. 55–6]

This perspective was echoed in the forerunner of the SWP, the **International Socialists**. In September 1968, the Political Committee of International Socialism submitted the “*Perspectives for I.S.*” Point 4 said:

*“Branches must accept directives from the Centre, unless they fundamentally disagree with them, in which case they should try to accord with them, while demanding an open debate on the matter.”* [quoted by Brinton, Op. Cit., p. 55f]

The parallels with Bakunin’s ideas are clear (see last section). However, it is to Bakunin’s credit that he argued that while “*each regional group have to obey it [the central committee] unconditionally*” he recognised that there existed “*cases where the orders of the Committee contradict either the general programme of the principle rules, or the general revolutionary plan of action, which are known to everybody as all ... have participated equally in the discussion of them.*” when this happened, “*members of the group must halt the execution of the Committee’s orders and call the Committee to judgement before the general meeting ... If the general meeting is discontented with the Committee, it can always substitute another one for it.*” Thus, rather than the unquestioning obedience of the Bolshevik party, who have to obey, then complain, the members of Bakunin’s group did not negate their judgement and could refuse to carry out orders.

Therefore, the SWP have a problem. On the one hand, they denounce Bakunin’s ideas of a centralised, secret top-down organisation of revolutionaries. On the other, the party structure that Lenin recommends is also a tightly disciplined, centralised, top-down structure with a membership limited to those who are willing to be professional revolutionaries. They obviously want to have their cake and eat it too. Unfortunately for them, they cannot. If they attack Bakunin, they must attack Lenin, not to do so is hypocrisy.

The simple fact is that the parallels between Bakunin’s and Lenin’s organisational ideas cannot be understood without recognising that both revolutionaries were operating in an autocratic state under conditions of complete illegality, with a highly organised political police trying to infiltrate and destroy any attempt to change the regime. Once this is recognised, the SWP’s comments can be seen to be hypocritical in the extreme. Nor can their feeble attempt to use Bakunin

to generalise about all anarchist organisations be taken seriously as Bakunin's organisations were not "major" nor were his ideas on secret organisation and organising followed after his death. They were a product of Bakunin's experiences in Tsarist Russian and not generic to anarchism (as the SWP know fine well).

Moreover, many people leave the SWP due to its undemocratic, authoritarian and bureaucratic nature. The comments by one group of ex-SWP dissidents indicate the hypocrisy of the SWP's attack on Bakunin:

*"The SWP is not democratic centralist but bureaucratic centralist. The leadership's control of the party is unchecked by the members. New perspectives are initiated exclusively by the central committee (CC), who then implement their perspective against all party opposition, implicit or explicit, legitimate or otherwise.*

*"Once a new perspective is declared, a new cadre is selected from the top down. The CC select the organisers, who select the district and branch committees — any elections that take place are carried out on the basis of 'slates' so that it is virtually impossible for members to vote against the slate proposed by the leadership. Any members who have doubts or disagreements are written off as 'burnt out' and, depending on their reaction to this, may be marginalised within the party and even expelled.*

*[...]*

*"The outcome is a party whose conferences have no democratic function, but serve only to orientate party activists to carry out perspectives drawn up before the delegates even set out from their branches. At every level of the party, strategy and tactics are presented from the top down, as pre-digested instructions for action. At every level, the comrades 'below' are seen only as a passive mass to be shifted into action, rather than as a source of new initiatives."* [ISG, Discussion Document of Ex-SWP Comrades]

They argue that a "democratic" party would involve the "[r]egular election of all party full-timers, branch and district leadership, conference delegates, etc. with the right of recall," which means that in the SWP appointment of full-timers, leaders and so on is the norm. They argue for the "right of branches to propose motions to the party conference" and for the "right for members to communicate horizontally in the party, to produce and distribute their own documents." They stress the need for "an independent Control Commission to review all disciplinary cases (independent of the leadership bodies that exercise discipline), and the right of any disciplined comrades to appeal directly to party conference." They argue that in a democratic party "no section of the party would have a monopoly of information" which indicates that the SWP's leadership is essentially secretive, withholding information from the party membership. [Op. Cit.] As can be seen, the SWP have little grounds on which to attack Bakunin given this damning account of its internal workings.

Other dissidents argue the same point. In 1991 members in Southampton SWP asked "When was the last time a motion or slate to conference was opposed?" and pointed out:

*"The CC usually stays the same or changes by one member. Most of the changes to its composition are made between Conferences. None of the CC's numerous decisions made over the preceding year are challenged or brought to account. Even the Pre-Conference bulletins contain little disagreements."*

They stress that:

*“There is real debate within the SWP, but the framework for discussion is set by the Central Committee. The agenda’s national events ... are set by the CC or its appointees and are never challenged ... Members can only express their views through Conference and Council to the whole party indirectly.”* [quoted by Trotwatch, **Carry On Recruiting!**, p. 39 and pp. 40–1]

Therefore, the SWP does not really have a leg to stand on. While Bakunin’s ideas on organisation are far from perfect, the actual practice of the SWP places their comments in context. They attack Bakunin while acting in similar ways while claiming they do not. Anarchists do not hold up Bakunin’s ideas on how anarchists should organise themselves as examples to be followed nor as particularly democratic (in contrast to his ideas on how the labour movement and revolution should be organised, which we **do** recommend) — as the SWP know. However, the SWP claim they are a revolutionary party and yet their organisational practices are deeply anti-democratic with a veneer of (bourgeois) democracy. The hypocrisy is clear.

Ironically, the ISG dissidents who attack the SWP for being “*bureaucratic centralist*” note that “[a]nybody who has spent time involved in ‘Leninist’ organisations will have come across workers who agree with Marxist politics but refuse to join the party because they believe it to be undemocratic and authoritarian. Many draw the conclusion that Leninism itself is at fault, as every organisation that proclaims itself Leninist appears to follow the same pattern.” [Lenin vs. the SWP: **Bureaucratic Centralism Or Democratic Centralism?**] This is a common refrain with Leninists — when reality says one thing and the theory another, it must be reality that is at fault. Yes, every Leninist organisation may be bureaucratic and authoritarian but it is not the theory’s fault that those who apply it are not capable of actually doing it. Such an application of scientific principles by the followers of “*scientific socialism*” is worthy of note — obviously the usual scientific method of generalising from facts to produce a theory is inapplicable when evaluating “scientific socialism” itself.

One last point. While some may argue that the obvious parallels between Bakunin’s ideas and Lenin’s should embarrass anarchists, most anarchists disagree. This is for four reasons.

Firstly, anarchists are **not** “*Bakuninists*” or followers of “*Bakuninism*.” This means that we do not blindly follow the ideas of individuals, rather we take what we find useful and reject the flawed and non-libertarian aspects of their ideas. Therefore, if we think Bakunin’s specific ideas on how revolutionaries should organise are flawed and not libertarian then we reject them while keeping the bulk of Bakunin’s useful and libertarian ideas as inspiration. We do not slavishly follow individuals or their ideas but apply critical judgement and embrace what we find useful and reject what we consider nonsense.

Secondly, anarchism did not spring fully formed out of Bakunin’s (or Proudhon’s or Kropotkin’s or whoever’s) mind. We expect individuals to make mistakes, not to be totally consistent, not totally break with their background. Bakunin clearly did not manage to break completely with his background as a political exile and an escapee from Tsarist Russia. Hence his arguments and support for secret organisation — his experiences, like Lenin’s, pushed him in that direction. Moreover, we should also remember that Russia was not the only country which the anarchist and labour movements were repressed during this time. In France, after the defeat of the Paris Commune, the International was made illegal. The Spanish section of the International had been



proscribed in 1872 and the central and regional authorities repressed it systematically from the summer of 1873, forcing the organisation to remain underground between 1874 and 1881. As can be seen, the SWP forget the historical context when attacking Bakunin's secrecy.

Thirdly, Bakunin did not, like Lenin, think that "*socialist consciousness*" had to be introduced into the working class. He argued that due to the "*economic struggle of labour and capital*" a worker who joined the International Workers' Association "*would inevitably discover, through the very force of circumstances and through the develop of this struggle, the political, socialist, and philosophical principles of the International.*" He thought that working class people were "**socialists without knowing it**" as "*their most basic instinct and their social situation makes them ... earnestly and truly socialist ... They are socialist because of all the conditions of their material existence and all the needs of their being... The workers lack neither the potential for socialist aspirations nor their actuality; they lack socialist thought.*" Thus the "*germs*" of "*socialist thought*" are to "*be found in the instinct of every earnest worker. The goal ... is to make the worker fully aware of what he wants.*" The method? The class struggle itself — "*the International relies on the collective experience he gains in its bosom, especially on the progress of the collective struggle of the workers against the bosses.*" [**The Basic Bakunin**, p. 100 and pp. 101–3]

Bakunin did not deny the importance of those who already are socialists to organise themselves and "*influence*" those who were not socialists so that in "*critical moments [they will] ... follow the International's lead.*" However, this influence was **not** to inject socialist ideas into the working class but rather to aid their development by the "*propagation of its [the International] ideas and ... the organisation of its members' natural effect on the masses.*" As can be seen, Bakunin's ideas on this subject differ considerably from Lenin's. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 139 and p. 140]

Unsurprisingly, the programme of the revolutionary organisation had to reflect the instincts and needs of the working population and must never be imposed on them. As he argued, the working masses were "*not a blank page on which any secret society can write whatever it wishes ... It has worked out, partly consciously, probably three-quarters unconsciously, its own programme which the secret society must get to know or guess and to which it must adapt itself.*" He stresses that once the state "*is destroyed ... the people will rise ... for **their own** [ideal]*" and anyone "*who tries to foist **his own** programme on the people will be left holding the baby.*" [quoted in **Daughter of a Revolutionary**, Michael Confino (ed.), p. 252, p. 254 and p. 256] As he stresses, libertarian socialist ideas come from the masses and not from outside them:

*"In opposition to ... oppressive statist orientations ... an entirely new orientation finally arose from the depths of the proletariat itself ... It proceeds directly to the abolition of all exploitation and all political or juridical as well as governmental and bureaucratic oppression, in other words, to the abolition of all classes ... and the abolition of their last buttress, the state.*

*"That is the program of social revolution."* [**Statism and Anarchy**, pp. 48–9]

Therefore, for Bakunin, the revolutionary organisation did not play the same role as for Lenin. It existed to aid the development of socialist consciousness within the working class, not inject that consciousness into a mass who cannot develop it by their own efforts. The difference is important as Lenin's theory justified the substitution of party power for workers power, the elimination of democracy and the domination of the party over the class it claimed to represent.

Bakunin, recognising that socialist ideas are “*instinctive*” in the working class due to their position in society and their everyday experiences, could not do this as the organisation existed to clarify these tendencies, not create them in the first place and inject them into the masses.

Lastly, the role the organisation plays in the workers’ movement and revolution are distinctly different. As Bakunin constantly stressed, the secret organisation must never take state power. As he put it, the “*main purpose and task of the organisation*” would be to “*help the people to achieve self-determination.*” It would “*not threaten the liberty of the people because it is free from all official character*” and “*not placed above the people like state power.*” Its programme “*consists of the fullest realisation of the liberty of the people*” and its influence is “*not contrary to the free development and self-determination of the people, or its organisation from below according to its own customs and instincts because it acts on the people only by the natural personal influence of its members who are not invested with any power.*” Thus the revolutionary group would be the “*helper*” of the masses, with an “*organisation within the people itself.*” [quoted by Michael Confino, *Op. Cit.*, p. 259, p. 261, p. 256 and p. 261] The revolution itself would see “*an end to all masters and to domination of every kind, and the free construction of popular life in accordance with popular needs, not from above downward, as in the state, but from below upward, by the people themselves, dispensing with all governments and parliaments — a voluntary alliance of agricultural and factory worker associations, communes, provinces, and nations; and, finally, ... universal human brotherhood triumphing on the ruins of all the states.*” [Statism and Anarchy, p. 33]

As can be seen, instead of seeking state power, as Lenin’s party desired, Bakunin’s would seek “*natural influence*” rather than “*official influence.*” As we argued in section J.3.7, this meant influencing the class struggle and revolution within the mass assemblies of workers’ associations and communes and in their federations. Rather than seek state power and official leadership positions, as the Leninist party does, Bakunin’s organisation rejected the taking of hierarchical positions in favour of working at the base of the organisation and providing a “*leadership of ideas*” rather than of people (see section J.3.6). While Bakunin’s organisational structures are flawed from a libertarian perspective (although more democratic than Marxists claim) the way it works within popular organisations is libertarian and in stark contrast with the Leninist position which sees these bodies as stepping stones for party power.

Therefore, Bakunin rejected key Leninist ideas and so cannot be considered as a forefather of Bolshevism in spite of similar organisational suggestions. The similarity in structure is due to a similarity in political conditions in Russia and **not** similarities in political ideas. If we look at Bakunin’s ideas on social revolution and the workers’ movement we see a fully libertarian perspective — of a movement from the bottom-up, based on the principles of direct action, self-management and federalism. Anarchists since his death have applied **these** ideas to the specific anarchist organisation as well, rejecting the non-libertarian elements of Bakunin’s ideas which the SWP correctly (if somewhat hypocritically and dishonestly) denounce.

## 22. Was the F.A.I. a “*centralised and secret*” organisation that shunned “*open debate and common struggle*”?

They move onto Spanish Anarchism:

*“The anarchist organisation inside the Spanish C.N.T., the F.A.I., was centralised and secret. A revolutionary party thrives on open debate and common struggle with wider groups of workers.”*

We discuss this Marxist myth in more detail in section 3 of the appendix on *“Marxists and Spanish Anarchism”*. However a few points are worth making. The F.A.I., regardless of what the SWP assert, was not centralised. It was a federation of autonomous affinity groups. As one member put it:

*“It was never its aim to act as a leadership or anything of the sort — to begin with they had no slogans, nor was any line laid down, let alone any adherence to any hierarchical structure ... This is what outside historians ought to grasp once and for all: that neither Durruti, nor Ascaso, nor Garcia Oliver — to name only the great C.N.T. spokesmen — issued any watchwords to the ‘masses,’ let alone delivered any operational plan or conspiratorial scheme to the bulk of the C.N.T. membership.”*

He stresses that:

*“Each F.A.I. group thought and acted as it deemed fit, without bothering about what the others might be thinking or deciding ... they had no ... opportunity or jurisdiction ... to foist a party line upon the grass-roots.”* [Francisco Carrasquer, quoted by Stuart Christie, **We, the Anarchists!**, p. 25 and p. 28]

Murray Bookchin paints a similar picture:

*“The F.A.I... was more loosely jointed as an organisation than many of its admirers and critics seem to recognise. It has no bureaucratic apparatus, no membership cards or dues, and no headquarters with paid officials, secretaries, and clerks... They jealously guarded the autonomy of their affinity groups from the authority of higher organisational bodies—a state of mind hardly conducive to the development of a tightly knit, vanguard organisation.*

*“The F.A.I., moreover, was not a politically homogeneous organisation which followed a fixed ‘line’ like the Communists and many Socialists. It had no official program by which all faistas could mechanically guide their actions.”* [**The Spanish Anarchists**, p. 224]

Stuart Christie argues that the decentralised nature of the F.A.I. helped it survive the frequent repression directed against it and the C.N.T:

*“The basic units of the F.A.I. were ... small autonomous affinity groups of anarchist militants. This cohesive quasi-cellular form of association had evolved, gradually, over the period of time it takes for relationships to be established and for mutual trust to grow. The affinity groups consisted, usually, of between three and 10 members bound by ties of friendship, and who shared well defined aims and agreed methods of struggle. Once such a group had come into existence it could, if it so wished, solicit affiliation to the F.A.I... The affinity groups were also highly resistant to police infiltration. Even if*

*filtration did occur, or police agents did manage to set up their own 'affinity' groups it would not have been a particularly efficient means of intelligence gathering; the atomic structure of the F.A.I. meant there was no central body to provide an overview of the movement as a whole."* [We, the Anarchists!, p. 28]

He stresses its decentralised nature:

*"Above all, it was not a representative body and involved **no** delegation of power either within the affinity groups or in the regional or national administrative bodies to empower those bodies to make decisions on behalf of the collectivity. Drawing on many years of revolutionary experience the F.A.I. was firmly rooted in federal principles and structured in such a way that its co-ordinating function did not deprive its constituent members of their autonomous power... In situations where it was necessary for delegates to take decisions, e.g. at plenary meetings during times of crisis or clandestinity, those decisions were required to be ratified by the whole membership who, in effect, constituted the administration... The groups in a city or town constituted a Local Federation while the rural groups, combined, formed a District Federation. These were administered by a secretariat and a committee composed of one mandated delegate from each affinity group. The Local and District Federations were obliged to convene regular assemblies of all groups in its area... Local and District Federations constituted a Regional Federation. These, in turn, were co-ordinated by a Peninsular Committee. None of these committees, local, district, regional or national, could be described as having a bureaucratic apparatus. Nor did they wield executive power of any description. Their function was purely administrative."* [Op. Cit., pp. 29–30]

Therefore, the claim that the F.A.I. was a centralised organisation is simply false. Rather it was a federation of autonomous groups, as can be seen (see also section 3 of the appendix on "*Marxists and Spanish Anarchism*" for more discussion on this topic).

Was the F.A.I. a "secret" organisation? When it was founded in 1927, Spain was under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera and so it was illegal and secret by necessity. As Stuart Christie correctly notes, "[a]s an organisation publicly committed to the overthrow of the dictatorship, the F.A.I. functioned, from 1927 to 1931, as an illegal rather than a secret organisation. From the birth of the Republic in 1931 onwards, the F.A.I. was simply an organisation which, until 1937, refused to register as an organisation as required by Republican Law." [We, the Anarchists!, p. 24] Thus it was illegal rather than secret. As one anarchist militant asked, "[i]f it was secret, how come I was able to attend F.A.I. meetings without ever having joined or paid dues to the 'specific' organisation?" [Francesco Carrasquer, quoted by Christie, Op. Cit., p. 24]

Moreover, given the periods of repression suffered by the Spanish libertarian movement throughout its history (including being banned and forced underground) being an illegal organisation made perfect sense. The anarchist movement was made illegal a number of times. Nor did the repression end during the Republic of 1931–6. This means that for the F.A.I. to be illegal was a sensible thing to do, particularly after failed revolutionary attempts resulted in massive arrests and the closing of union halls. Again, the SWP ignore historical context and so mislead the reader.

Did the F.A.I. ignore "open debate and common struggle." No, of course not. The members of the F.A.I. were also members of the C.N.T. The C.N.T. was based around mass assemblies in which

all members could speak. It was here that members of the F.A.I. took part in forming C.N.T. policy along with other C.N.T. members. Anarchists in the C.N.T. who were not members of the F.A.I. indicate this. Jose Borrás Casacarosa notes that “[o]ne has to recognise that the F.A.I. did not intervene in the C.N.T. from above or in an authoritarian manner as did other political parties in the unions. It did so from the base through militants ... the decisions which determined the course taken by the C.N.T. were taken under constant pressure from these militants.” Jose Campos notes that F.A.I. militants “tended to reject control of confederal committees and only accepted them on specific occasions ... if someone proposed a motion in assembly, the other F.A.I. members would support it, usually successfully. It was the individual standing of the faista in open assembly.” [quoted by Stuart Christie, *Op. Cit.*, p. 62] As Francisco Ascaso (friend of Durruti and an influential anarchist militant in the C.N.T. and F.A.I. in his own right) put it:

*“There is not a single militant who as a ‘F.A.I.ista’ intervenes in union meetings. I work, therefore I am an exploited person. I pay my dues to the workers’ union and when I intervene at union meetings I do it as someone who is exploited, and with the right which is granted me by the card in my possession, as do the other militants, whether they belong to the F.A.I. or not.”* [cited by Abel Paz, *Durruti: The People Armed*, p. 137]

This meant that it was at union meetings and congresses where policies and the program for the movement were argued out:

*“[D]elegates, whether or not they were members of the F.A.I., were presenting resolutions adopted by their unions at open membership meetings. Actions taken at the congress had to be reported back to their unions at open meetings, and given the degree of union education among the members, it was impossible for delegates to support personal, non-representative positions.”* [Juan Gomez Casas, *Anarchist Organisation: The History of the F.A.I.*, p. 121]

As can be seen, open debate with their fellow workers in the union assemblies. In this they followed Bakunin’s arguments that anarchist organisation “rules out any idea of dictatorship and of a controlling and directive power” and it “will promote the Revolution only through the **natural but never official influence** of all members of the Alliance.” This influence would be exerted in the union assemblies, as the union members “could only defend their rights and their autonomy in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings. Nothing arouses the antipathy of the committees more than these popular assemblies... In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda was amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed...” This would ensure that the assemblies had “real autonomy” and actually were the real power in the organisation. Any committees would be made up of “delegates who conscientiously fulfilled all their obligations to their respective sections as stipulated in the statutes,” “reporting regularly to the membership the proposals made and how they voted” and “asking for further instructions (plus instant recall of unsatisfactory delegates)” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 154, p. 387 and p. 247]

The anarchist revolution would be organised in an identical fashion, and, in Bakunin’s words, “must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards

*by means of revolutionary delegations ... [who] will set out to administer public services, not to rule over peoples.” [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 172]*

As can be seen, the F.A.I. (like all anarchists) influenced the class struggle and revolution via their natural influence in winning debates with their fellow workers in union assemblies. They did not seek power but rather influence for their ideas. To claim otherwise, to claim that anarchists reject open debate with their fellow workers is false. Instead of seeking to power — and so limiting debates to during elections — anarchists argue that people must control their own organisations (and so the revolution) directly and all the time. This means, as can be seen, we encourage open debate and discussion far more than those, like the SWP, who seek centralised political power for themselves. In such a system, the only people who debate regularly are the members of the government — everyone else is just a voter and an order taker.

### 23. Do anarchists wait for “*spontaneous upsurges by workers*”?

After lying about the F.A.I., they move on to lying about anarchist theory:

*“Anarchists instead look to spontaneous upsurges by workers. In the struggle anarchists will declare themselves and urge the workers on. They hope this will lead to the toppling of capitalism. History is full of mass struggles which have been able to win significant gains, but which have not had a clear leadership that can carry the struggle over to victory against capitalism.”*

Nothing could be further from the truth. Their own article exposes their lies. They mention the C.N.T., which was organised in an anarchist way and in which anarchists were heavily involved. Anarchists from Bakunin onward have all argued in favour of organising as anarchists as well as organising workers and fighting for reforms in the here and now. For Bakunin, “*the natural organisation of the masses ... is organisation based on the various ways that their various types of work define their day-to-day life; it is organisation by trade association.*” [The Basic Bakunin, p. 139] He stressed the importance of anarchists being involved in unions as well as union struggle for reforms by direct action:

*“What policy should the International [Workers’ Association] follow during th[e] somewhat extended time period that separates us from this terrible social revolution ... the International will give labour unrest in all countries an essentially economic character, with the aim of reducing working hours and increasing salary, by means of the association of the working masses ... It will [also] propagandise its principles ...” [Op. Cit., p. 109]*

Indeed, he saw the labour movement as the means to create a socialist society:

*“The masses are a force, or at least the essential elements of a force. What do they lack? They lack two things which up till now constituted the power of all government: organisation and knowledge.*

*“The organisation of the International [Workers’ Association], having for its objective not the creation of new despotisms but the uprooting of all domination, will take on*

*an essentially different character from the organisation of the State... But what is the organisation of the masses? ... It is the organisation by professions and trades ...*

*"The organisation of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labour ... bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world. They are creating not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself."* [Bakunin on Anarchism, pp. 254–5]

All anarchists have stressed the importance of working in and outside the labour movement to gain influence for anarchist ideas of direct action, solidarity, self-management and federalism in the here and now, rather than waiting for a "*spontaneous uprising*" to occur. As Kropotkin argued, "*Revolutionary Anarchist Communist propaganda with Labour Unions had always been a favourite mode of action in the Federalist [or libertarian] ... section of the International Working Men's Association.*" [Act For Yourselves, p. 119] Malatesta makes the same point:

*"anarchists, convinced of the validity of our programme, must strive to acquire overwhelming influence in order to draw the movement towards the realisation of our ideas. But such influence must be won by doing more and better than others, and will only be useful if won in that way.*

*"Today we must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and co-ordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement to prevent it being limited to and corrupted by the exclusive pursuit of small improvements compatible with the capitalist system; and we must act in such a way that it contributes to preparing for a complete social transformation. We must work with the unorganised, and perhaps un-organisable, masses to awaken a spirit of revolt and the desire and hope for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers. We must, in short, prepare, and prepare ourselves, morally and materially, for the revolutionary act which will open the way to the future."* [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 109]

Therefore, as can be seen, the SWP's assertions are totally at odds with the actual ideas of anarchists, as would be known by anyone with even a basic understanding of anarchist theory. After all, if spontaneous uprisings were sufficient in themselves we would be living in an anarchist society. As Bakunin argued "*if instinct alone had been sufficient for the liberation of peoples, they would have long since freed themselves.*" [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 254] This explains why anarchists organise as **anarchists** in groups and federations to influence the class struggle. We are aware of the need for revolutionaries to organise to influence the class struggle, spread anarchist ideas and tactics and present the case for revolutionary change. An anarchist society will not come about by accident, it must be consciously desired and created by the mass of the population. As Kropotkin argued:

*"Communist organisations ... must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free."* [Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 140]

So, clearly, anarchists see the importance of working class organisation and struggle in the here and now. Anarchists are active in industrial disputes and (as the SWP note) the anti-globalisation movement and were heavily involved in the anti-poll-tax and anti-Criminal Justice Act struggles in the UK, for example. The role of anarchists is not to wait for “*upsurges*” but rather to encourage them by spreading our ideas and encouraging workers to organise and fight their bosses and the state. It is for this reason anarchists form groups and federations, to influence workers today rather than waiting for a “*spontaneous uprising*” to occur. Moreover, it is quite ironic that the SWP say that anarchists wait for upsurges before declaring themselves to the masses. After all, that is what the SWP do. They turn up at picket lines and try and sell their paper and party to the strikers. Obviously, if anarchist do this, it is bad, if the SWP do it, then it is “*revolutionary*.”

Therefore, rather than believing in or waiting for “*spontaneous upsurges*” anarchists, like the SWP, spread their message, try and convince people to become revolutionaries. That is why there are numerous anarchist federations across the world, involved in numerous struggles and working class organisations, with magazines, papers and leaflets being produced and distributed. Anarchists stress the importance of winning people over to anarchist ideas and of giving a “*lead*” in struggle rather than as a “*leadership*” (which implies a hierarchical relationship between the mass of people and a group of leaders). To state otherwise, to argue we wait for spontaneous uprisings, is simply a lie.

Anarchist organisations see themselves in the role of aiders, not leaders. As Voline argued, the politically aware minority “*should intervene. But, in every place and under all circumstances, ... [they] should freely participate in the common work, as true collaborators, not as dictators. It is necessary that they especially create an example, and employ themselves... without dominating, subjugating, or oppressing anyone... Accordingly to the libertarian thesis, it is the labouring masses themselves, who, by means of the various class organisations, factory committees, industrial and agricultural unions, co-operatives, et cetera, federated... should apply themselves everywhere, to solving the problems of waging the Revolution... As for the ‘elite’ [i.e. the politically aware], their role, according to the libertarians, is to **help** the masses, enlighten them, teach them, give them necessary advice, impel them to take initiative, provide them with an example, and support them in their action — but not to direct them governmentally.*” [The Unknown Revolution, pp. 177–8]

Sadly, Leninists like the SWP confuse giving a led with taking power themselves. They seek to take over positions of responsibility in a movement and turn them into positions of power which they can use to tell the others what to do. Instead of being the servants of the organisation, they become its masters. For this reason anarchist organisations try to influence movements from below, in the mass assemblies which make it up, rather than seek power.

## 24. Do anarchists blame workers “*for being insufficiently revolutionary*”?

After creating a straw man about anarchist theory, they draw some thoughts from it:

*“When struggles have not spontaneously broken capitalism, anarchists have tended to end up blaming workers for being insufficiently revolutionary. So 19<sup>th</sup> century French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon started off talking of his ‘love of the people’ but ended up saying he ‘despised’ humanity because they had not overthrown capitalism.”*



Strange that they picked Proudhon as he was not a revolutionary anarchist. Rather he favoured the reform of capitalism via mutual credit and workers' co-operatives and rejected the idea of "uprisings" and/or revolution (spontaneous or not). Anyone with even a limited knowledge of Proudhon's work would know this. In addition, Proudhon's last book (**The Political Capacity of the Working Classes**), finished on his death bed, was an attempt to influence the workers' movement towards his ideas of mutualism and federalism. Hardly to be expected from someone who "despised" humanity for not overthrowing capitalism. As examples go, the SWP is clearly clutching at straws.

Moreover, as we argued in the last section, revolutionary anarchists like Bakunin, Malatesta, Kropotkin, Goldman, Berkman, Rocker, etc., all placed a great deal of time and energy in trying to work within and influence workers' struggles and the labour movement in the here and now. They did not think that workers struggles would necessarily "spontaneously" break capitalism. While recognising, as we indicated in section 10, that the class struggle changed the ideas of those involved, they recognised the need for anarchist groups, papers, pamphlets to influence the class struggle in a libertarian way and towards a revolution. They were well aware that "spontaneous" uprisings occurred but were not enough in themselves — anarchists would need to organise as anarchists to influence the class struggle, particularly when "uprisings" were not occurring and the daily struggle between governed and governor, exploited and exploiter was taking less spectacular forms (hence anarchist support and involvement in the labour movement and unions like the C.N.T.).

The SWP then move onto an even greater factual error. They claim that the *"biggest anarchist groups today, the 'autonomists' in Europe, treat workers who have not fully broken with capitalist ideas as an enemy rather than a potential ally."* Unfortunately for them, the "autonomists" are not generally anarchists (the name should have given the SWP some clue, as anarchists are quite proud of their name and generally use it, or libertarian, to describe themselves). Rather the "autonomists" are non-Leninist Marxists whose ideas (and name) originally came from the Marxist left in Italy during the 1960s. It is also probable that the various European anarchist federations (such as the French and Italian) and anarcho-syndicalist unions are bigger than the autonomists. However, without any examples of the groups meant it is hard to evaluate the accuracy of the SWP's claims as regards their size or opinions. Suffice it to say, the leading theorists of "autonomism" such as Toni Negri and Harry Cleaver do not express the opinions the SWP claim "autonomists" have.

## 25. Why does the history of centralised parties refute the SWP's arguments?

The SWP admit that their analysis leaves much to be desired by mentioning that *"[m]any anarchists understand the way that capitalism works and organise to change the world."* In other words, if an anarchist points out the flaws in their argument or a reader knows an anarchist who does not match the SWP's distorted picture, then the SWP can say that they are part of the "many." Extremely handy, if dishonest, comment to make.

The SWP continue by arguing that our *"rejection of centralisation means that at critical moments their intervention in the struggle is fatally flawed."* This is ironic. Given that their example of the benefits of centralisation showed the flaws in that method of organising, their conclusion seems

without basis. Moreover, as argued above, centralisation is the key means by which minorities govern majorities. It is a tool used to impose minority rule and is not designed for other uses. But, then again, the SWP do aim for minority rule — the rule of the “revolutionary” party over the masses. As they argue:

*“The working class needs what anarchism rejects — a clear and determined revolutionary party which can lead the working class as a whole, and is not afraid to overthrow capitalism and set up a workers’ state.”*

Yes, indeed. The examples of the current anti-capitalist movement, the poll tax revolt and the 1917 February Russian revolution indicate well that a revolutionary party works. If such a party had led the working class in each of these events, they would not have occurred. The workers would have done nothing, as the Bolsheviks desired. People would have paid their poll tax waiting for the trade union bureaucrats to act. The anti-globalisation demonstrations would not have happened as the “vanguard” party did not recognise their importance.

The Russian Revolution quickly resulted in the marginalisation of the workers’ councils by the centralised, “clear and determined” Bolsheviks who turned them into rubber stamps of their government, it suggests that the politics of the SWP leave much to be desired. Given that the one “success” of Leninist politics — the Russian Revolution of October 1917 — created state capitalism, with workers’ soviets and factory committees undermined in favour of party power (**before**, we must stress, the start of the civil war — what most Leninists blame the rise of Stalinism on) we may suggest that **anarchist** ideas have been proven correct again and again. After all, the validity of a theory surely lies in its ability to **explain** and **predict** events. Anarchists, for example, predicted both the degeneration of both Social Democracy and the Russian revolution, the two main examples of Marxism in action, and presented coherent reasons **why** this would happen. Marxists have had to generate theories to explain these events **after** they have occurred, theories which conveniently ignore the role of Marxist politics in historical events.

This, we suggest, provides the explanation of why they have spent so much time re-writing history and smearing anarchism. Not being able to discuss our ideas honestly — for that would expose the authoritarian ideas of Bolshevism and its role in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution — the SWP invent a straw man they call anarchism and beat him to death. Unfortunately for them, anarchists are still around and can expose their lies for what they are.

# Reply to errors and distortions in John Fisher's *“Why we must further Marxism and not Anarchism”*

On the Trotskyist “New Youth” webpage there is an article entitled “Why we must further Marxism and not Anarchism” by John Fisher. This article contains numerous distortions of anarchist ideas and positions. Indeed, he makes so many basic errors that only two possible explanations are possible: either he knows nothing about anarchism or he does and is consciously lying.

We will compare his assertions to what anarchist theory actually argues in order to show that this is the case.

## 1. Why should *“the so-called Anarchistic youth of today”* be concerned that Trotskyists consider them allies?

Fisher starts his diatribe against anarchism with some thoughts on the radical youth active in the anti-globalisation demonstrations and movements:

*“The so-called Anarchistic youth of today, year 2001, for the most part simply use the term ‘Anarchist’ as an indication of not wanting to go along with the ‘system’ in not wanting to assimilate, which is a giant leap forward on their part considering all their lives they’ve constantly been bombarded with the huge American Corporate propaganda machine. For this achievement, they are already more our ally than our enemy.”*

It makes you wonder how Fisher knows this. Has there been a poll of “anarchistic youth” recently? It would be interesting to discover the empirical basis for this statement. Given the quality of the rest of the article, we can hazard a guess and say that these particular facts are just assertions and express wishful thinking rather than any sort of reality.

Needless to say, these “*anarchistic youth*” had better watch out. We all know what happens to the “*ally*” of the vanguard party once that party takes power. Anarchists remember the fate of our comrades when Lenin and Trotsky ruled the “proletarian” state.

The Russian anarchists were at the forefront of the struggle between the February and October revolutions in 1917. As socialist historian Samuel Farber notes, the anarchists “*had actually been an unnamed coalition partner of the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution.*” [Before Stalinism, p. 126] The anarchists were the “allies” of the Bolsheviks before they took power as both shared the goals of abolishing the provisional government and for a social revolution which would end capitalism.

This changed once the Bolsheviks had taken power. On the night of April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the Cheka surrounded 26 Anarchist clubs in Moscow, in the ensuing fighting Anarchists suffered 40 casualties and 500 were taken prisoner. The Petrograd anarchists protested this attack:

*“The Bolsheviks have lost their senses. They have betrayed the proletariat and attacked the anarchists. They have joined ... the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. They have declared war on revolutionary anarchism... We regarded you [Bolsheviks] as our revolutionary brothers. But you have proved to be traitors. You are Cains — you have killed your brothers ... There can be no peace with the traitors to the working class. The executioners of the revolution wish to become the executioners of anarchism.”* [quoted by Paul Avrich, **The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution**, p. 113]

Fifteen days later similar raids were carried out in Petrograd. This repression, we must note, took place months before the outbreak of the Russian Civil War (in late May 1918). In May of that year, leading anarchist periodicals (including **Burevestnik**, **Anarkhia** and **Golos Truda**) were closed down by the government. The repression continued during the war and afterwards. Many imprisoned anarchists were deported from the “workers’ state” in 1921 after they went on hunger strike and their plight was raised by libertarian delegates to the founding congress of the Red International of Labour Unions held that year.

Unsurprisingly, the Bolsheviks denied they held anarchists. French anarchist Gaston Leval accounted how Lenin had “*reiterated the charges made by Dzerzhinsky [founder of the Bolsheviks secret police, the Cheka] ... Those in prison were not true anarchists nor idealists — just bandits abusing our good intentions.*” Leval, having gathered the facts, indicated this was not true, making Lenin backtrack. [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 213]

Unsurprisingly, when the libertarian delegates to the congress reported back on conditions in Russia to their unions, they withdrew from the Trade-Union International.

In the Ukraine, the anarchist influenced Makhnovist movement also became an “ally” with the Bolsheviks in the common struggle against the counter-revolutionary White armies. The Bolsheviks betrayed their allies each time they formed an alliance.

The first alliance was in March 1919 during the struggle against Denikin. In May of that year, two Cheka agents sent to assassinate Makhno (the main leader of the movement) were caught and executed. The following month Trotsky, the commander of the Red Army, outlawed the Makhnovists and Communist troops attacked their headquarters at Gulyai-Polye.

Denikin’s massive attack on Moscow in September 1919 saw the shaky alliance resumed in the face of a greater threat. Once Denikin had been defeated, the Bolsheviks ordered the Makhnovists to the Polish front. This was obviously designed to draw them away from their home territory, so leaving it defenceless against Bolshevik rule. The Makhnovists refused and Trotsky, again, outlawed and attacked them.

Hostilities were again broken off when the White General Wrangel launched a major offensive in the summer of 1920. Again the Bolsheviks signed a pact with Makhno. This promised amnesty for all anarchists in Bolshevik prisons, freedom for anarchist propaganda, free participation to the Soviets and “*in the region where the Makhnovist Army is operating, the population of workers and peasants will create its own institutions of economic and political self-management.*” [quoted by Peter Arshinov, **The History of the Makhnovist Movement**, pp. 177–9] Once Wrangel had been defeated, the Bolsheviks ripped up the agreement and turned their forces, once again, against their “ally” and finally drove them out of the Soviet Union in 1921.

These events should be remembered when the authoritarian left argue that we aim for the same thing and are allies.

## 2. What else do people learn about when they discover anarchism is not “*utter rebellion*”?

Fisher continues:

*“In some cases, ‘Anarchist’ youth begin to try to learn about what Anarchism truly is instead of seeing it merely as utter rebellion. They learn Anarchism is a form of Socialism, they learn they have much in common with Marxists, they learn the state must be smashed, they learn the state is a tool of suppression used by one class against another.”*

They learn much more than this. They learn, for example, about the history of Marxism and how anarchism differs from it.

They learn, for example, about the history of Marxist Social Democracy. Many forget that Social Democracy was the first major Marxist movement. It was formed initially in Germany in 1875 when the followers of Lassalle and Marx united to form the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). This party followed Marx and Engels recommendations that workers should form a distinct political party and conquer political power. It rejected the anarchist argument that workers should “*abstain from politics*” (i.e. elections) and instead, to use an expression from Marx’s preamble of the French Workers’ Party, turn the franchise “*from a means of deception ... into an instrument of emancipation.*” [Marx and Engels Reader, p. 566]

Rather than confirm Marx’s politics, Social Democracy confirmed Bakunin’s. It quickly degenerated into reformism. As Bakunin predicted, when “*the workers ... send common workers ... to Legislative Assemblies ... The worker-deputies, transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be workers and, becoming Statesmen, they will become bourgeois ... For men do not make their situations; on the contrary, men are made by them.*” [The Basic Bakunin, p. 108]

From the early 1890s, Social Democracy was racked by arguments between reformists (the “revisionist” wing) and revolutionaries. The former wanted to adapt the party and its rhetoric to what it was doing. As one of the most distinguished historians of this period put it, the “*distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference of ideas in the evaluation of reality rather than a difference in the realm of action.*” [C. Schorske, German Social Democracy, p. 38]

In 1914, the majority of social democrats in Germany and across the world supported their state in the imperialist slaughter of the First World. This disgraceful end would not have surprised Bakunin.

Anarchists also learn about the Russian Revolution. They learn how Lenin and Trotsky eliminated democracy in the armed forces, in the workplace and in the soviets.

They learn, for example, that the Bolsheviks had disbanded soviets which had been elected with non-Bolshevik majorities in the spring and summer of 1918. [Samuel Farber, Op. Cit., p. 24]

They learn that at the end of March, 1918, Trotsky reported to the Communist Party that “*the principle of election is politically purposeless and technically inexpedient, and it has been, in practice,*

*abolished by decree*” in the Red Army. [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control**, pp. 37–8]

They learn that Lenin opposed workers’ management of production. Before the October Revolution he saw “workers’ control” purely in terms of the “*universal, all-embracing workers’ control over the capitalists.*” [**Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power?**, p. 52] He did not see it in terms of workers’ management of production itself (i.e. the abolition of wage labour) via federations of factory committees. Anarchists and the workers’ factory committees did. “*On three occasions in the first months of Soviet power, the [factory] committee leaders sought to bring their model into being. At each point the party leadership overruled them. The result was to vest both managerial and control powers in organs of the state which were subordinate to the central authorities, and formed by them.*” [Thomas F. Remington, **Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia**, p. 38]

Lenin himself quickly supported “one-man management” invested with “dictatorial powers” after “control over the capitalists” failed. By 1920, Trotsky was advocating the “militarisation of labour” and implemented his ideas on the railway workers.

They learn that Leninism is just another form of capitalism (state capitalism). As Lenin put it, socialism “*is nothing but the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. In other words, Socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people; by this token it ceases to be capitalist monopoly.*” [**The Threatening Catastrophe and how to avoid it**, p. 37]

They learn that Lenin and Trotsky argued for party dictatorship and centralised, top-down rule (see section 4).

They also learn that this should not come as a surprise. Anarchism argues that the state is a tool to allow minorities to rule and has been designed to ensure minority power. They learn that it cannot, by its very nature, be a tool for liberation — no matter who is in charge of it.

### 3. What do anarchists think will “*replace the smashed state machine*”?

Fisher now makes a common Marxist assertion. He states:

*“But what they do not learn, and never will from an Anarchist perspective is what is to replace the smashed state machine?”*

In reality, if you read anarchist thinkers you will soon discover what anarchists think will “replace” the state: namely the various working class organisations created by the class struggle and revolution. In the words of Kropotkin, the “*elaboration of new social forms can only be the collective work of the masses.*” [**Words of a Rebel**, p. 175] He stressed that “[to] make a revolution it is not ... enough that there should be ... [popular] risings ... It is necessary that after the risings there should be something new in the institutions [that make up society], which would permit new forms of life to be elaborated and established.” [**The Great French Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 200]

Thus the framework of a free society would be created by the process of the revolution itself. As such, as Kropotkin put it, “[d]uring a revolution new forms of life will always germinate on the ruins of the old forms ... It is impossible to legislate for the future. All we can do is vaguely guess its essential tendencies and clear the road for it.” [**Evolution and Environment**, pp. 101–2] So while the specific forms these organisations would take cannot be predicted, their general nature can be.

So what is the general nature of these new organisations? Anarchists have consistently argued that the state would be replaced by a free federation of workers' associations and communes, self-managed and organised from the bottom-up. In Malatesta's words, anarchy is the "*free organisation from below upwards, from the simple to the complex, through free agreement and the federation of associations of production and consumption.*" In particular, he argued anarchists aim to "*push the workers to take possession of the factories, to federate among themselves and work for the community*" while the peasants "*should take over the land and produced usurped by the landlords, and come to an agreement with the industrial workers.*" [Life and Ideas, p. 147 and p. 165]

This vision of revolution followed Bakunin's:

*"the federative alliance of all working men's associations ... [will] constitute the Commune ... [the] Communal Council [will be] composed of ... delegates ... vested with plenary but accountable and removable mandates... all provinces, communes and associations ... by first reorganising on revolutionary lines ... [will] constitute the federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [and] organise a revolutionary force capable defeating reaction ... [and for] self-defence ... [The] revolution everywhere must be created by the people, and supreme control must always belong to the people organised into a free federation of agricultural and industrial associations ... organised from the bottom upwards by means of revolutionary delegation..."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 170–2]

Similarly, Proudhon argued federations of workers associations and communes to replace the state. While seeing such activity as essentially reformist in nature, he saw the germs of anarchy as being the result of "*generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them*" as "*it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings: an agricultural and industrial combination must be found by means of which power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave.*" [System of Economical Contradictions, p. 399 and p. 398] What, decades later, Proudhon called an "*agro-industrial federation*" in his **Principle of Federation**.

Kropotkin, unsurprisingly enough, had similar ideas. He saw the revolution as the "*expropriation of the whole of social wealth*" by the workers, who "*will organise the workshops so that they continue production*" once "*the governments are swept out by the people.*" The "*coming social revolution*" would see "*the complete abolition of States, and reorganisation from the simple to the complex through the free federation of the popular forces of producers and consumers,*" the "*federation of workers' corporations and groups of consumers.*" The "*Commune will know that it must break the State and replace it by the Federation*" (which is "*freely accepted by itself as well as the other communes*"). [Words of a Rebel, p. 99, p. 91, p. 92 and p. 83]

Thus "*independent Communes for the territorial organisation, and of federations of Trade Unions [i.e. workplace associations] for the organisation of men [and women] in accordance with their different functions, gave a **concrete** conception of society regenerated by a social revolution.*" [Peter Kropotkin, **Evolution and Environment**, p. 79]

In his classic history of the French Revolution he pointed to "*the popular Commune*" as an example of the "*something new*" required to turn an uprising into a revolution. He argued that "*the Revolution began by creating the Commune ... and through this institution it gained ... immense power.*" He stressed that it was "*by means of the 'districts' [of the Communes] that ... the masses,*

*accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government.*” Such a system did not imply isolation, for while *“the districts strove to maintain their own independence”* they also *“sought for unity of action, not in subjection to a Central Committee, but in a federative union.”* The Commune *“was thus made from below upward, by the federation of the district organisations; it spring up in a revolutionary way, from popular initiative.”* [The Great French Revolution, vol. 1, p. 200 and p. 203]

During the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, Kropotkin expressed his support for the soviets created by the workers in struggle. He argued that anarchists should *“enter the Soviets, but certainly only as far as the Soviets are organs of the struggle against the bourgeoisie and the state, and not organs of authority.”* [quoted by Graham Purchase, **Evolution and Revolution**, p. 30] After the 1917 revolution, he re-iterated this point, arguing that *“idea of soviets ... of councils of workers and peasants ... controlling the economic and political life of the country is a great idea. All the more so, since it necessarily follows that these councils should be composed of all who take part in the production of natural wealth by their own efforts.”* [Kropotkin’s Revolutionary Pamphlets, p. 254]

Therefore, Fisher’s comments are totally untrue. Anarchists have been pretty clear on this issue from Proudhon onwards (see section I.2.3 for a further discussion of this issue).

#### 4. What did Trotsky and Lenin think must replace the bourgeois state?

Fisher continues his inaccurate attack:

*“What we as Marxists explain is what must replace the smashed bourgeois state machine.*

*“Engels explains that the state is a ‘special coercive force’. So what must come after the bourgeoisie is overthrown to keep it down? As Lenin explains in the State and Revolution: the bourgeois state ‘must be replaced by a “special coercive force” for the suppression of the bourgeois by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the proletariat)’ (pg 397 vol. 25 collected works) that is workers’ democracy.”*

There are numerous issues here. Firstly, of course, is the question of how to define the state. Fisher implicitly assumes that anarchists and Marxists share the same definition of what marks a “state.” Secondly, there is the question of whether quoting Lenin’s **State and Revolution** without relating it to Bolshevik practice is very convincing. Thirdly, there is the question of the defence of the revolution. We will discuss the second question here, the first in the next section and the third in section 6.

There is a well-known difference between Lenin’s work **The State and Revolution** and actual Bolshevik practice. In the former, Lenin promised the widest democracy, although he also argued that *“[w]e cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy, without representative institutions.”* [“The State and Revolution”, **Essential Works of Lenin**, p. 306] Clearly, he saw “democracy” in the normal, bourgeois, sense of electing a government who will make the decisions for the electors. Indeed, the *“dictatorship of the proletariat”* is described as *“the organisation of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class.”* [Op. Cit., p. 337] This “vanguard” is the party:



*“By educating the workers’ party, Marxism educates the vanguard of the proletariat which is capable of assuming power and of leading the whole people to Socialism, of directing and organising the new order, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the toiling and exploited in the task of building up their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie.” [Op. Cit., p. 288]*

So the vanguard of the oppressed would become the “*ruling class*”, **not** the oppressed. This means that “*workers’ democracy*” is simply reduced to meaning the majority designates its rulers but does not rule itself. As such, the “workers’ state” is just the same as any other state (see next section).

Thus, before taking power Lenin argued for party power, not workers’ power. The workers can elect representatives who govern on their behalf, but they do not actually manage society themselves. This is the key contradiction for Bolshevism — it confuses workers’ power with party power.

Post-October, the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky changed. If their works are consulted, it is soon discovered what they thought should “replace” the bourgeois state: party dictatorship.

In the words of Lenin (from 1920):

*“In the transition to socialism the dictatorship of the proletariat is inevitable, but it is not exercised by an organisation which takes in all industrial workers ... What happens is that the Party, shall we say, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat, and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat.” [Collected Works, vol. 21, p. 20]*

He stressed that this was an inevitable aspect of revolution, applicable in all countries:

*“the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of the class, because in all capitalist countries (and not only over here, in one of the most backward) the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts ... that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship. It can be exercised only by a vanguard ... Such is the basic mechanism of the dictatorship of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the essentials of transitions from capitalism to communism ... for the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised by a mass proletarian organisation.” [Op. Cit., vol. 32, p. 21]*

Trotsky agreed with this lesson and argued it to the end of his life:

*“The revolutionary dictatorship of a proletarian party is for me not a thing that one can freely accept or reject: It is an objective necessity imposed upon us by the social realities — the class struggle, the heterogeneity of the revolutionary class, the necessity for a selected vanguard in order to assure the victory. The dictatorship of a party belongs to the barbarian prehistory as does the state itself, but we can not jump over this chapter, which can open (not at one stroke) genuine human history... The revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution ... Abstractly speaking, it would be very well if the party dictatorship could be*

*replaced by the ‘dictatorship’ of the whole toiling people without any party, but this presupposes such a high level of political development among the masses that it can never be achieved under capitalist conditions. The reason for the revolution comes from the circumstance that capitalism does not permit the material and the moral development of the masses.” [Writings 1936–37, pp. 513–4]*

Lenin and Trotsky are clearly explaining the need for party dictatorship over the working class. This was seen as a **general** lesson of the Russian Revolution. How many Marxists “explain” this to anarchists?

Clearly, then, Fisher is not being totally honest when he argues that Trotskyism is based on “workers’ democracy.” Lenin, for example, argued that *“Marxism teaches — and this tenet has not only been formally endorsed by the whole of the Communist International in the decisions of the second Congress ... but has also been confirmed in practice by our revolution — that only the political party of the working class, i.e. the Communist Party, is capable of uniting, training and organising a vanguard of the proletariat and of the whole working people that alone will be capable of withstanding the inevitable petty-bourgeois vacillations of this mass.”* [Op. Cit., vol. 32, p. 246]

Lenin is, of course, rejecting what democracy is all about, namely the right and duty of representative bodies to carry out the wishes of the electors (i.e. their “vacillations”). Instead of workers’ democracy, he is clearly arguing for the right of the party to ignore it and impose its own wishes on the working class.

Trotsky argued along the same lines (again in 1921):

*“They [the dissent Bolsheviks of the Workers’ Opposition] have placed the workers’ right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the worker’s democracy!”*

He spoke of the “revolutionary historic birthright of the Party” and that it “is obliged to maintain its dictatorship ... regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class ... The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers’ democracy.” [quoted by M. Brinton, **The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control**, p. 78]

Needless to say, they did not explain how these lessons and arguments are compatible with Lenin’s **State and Revolution** where he had argued that “[a]ll officials, without exception,” must be “elected and subject to recall **at any time**.” [The Essential Lenin, p. 302] If they are subject to election and recall at any time, then they will reflect the “passing moods” (the “vacillations”) of the workers’ democracy. Therefore, to combat this, soviet democracy must be replaced by party dictatorship and neither Lenin nor Trotsky were shy in both applying and arguing this position.

It is a shame, then, for Fisher’s argument that both Lenin and Trotsky also explained why party dictatorship was more important than workers’ democracy. It is doubly harmful for his argument as both argued that this “lesson” was of a **general** nature and applicable for all revolutions.

It is also a shame for Fisher’s argument that the Leninists, once in power, overthrew every soviet that was elected with a non-Bolshevik majority (see section 6 of the appendix on “What happened during the Russian Revolution?”). They also repressed those who demanded real workers’ democracy (as, for example, in Kronstadt in 1921 — see the appendix on “What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?” — or during the numerous strikes under Lenin’s rule — see sections 3 and 5 of the appendix on “What caused the degeneration of the Russian Revolution?”).

Clearly, Fisher's account of Trotskyism, like his account of anarchism, leaves a lot to be desired.

## 5. Is the “proletarian ‘state’” really a new kind of state?

Fisher, after keeping his readers ignorant of Lenin and Trotsky real position on workers' democracy, argues that:

*“The proletariat ‘state’ is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word, Lenin explains, because it is no longer the minority suppressing the majority, but the vast majority suppressing a tiny minority! The Proletariat suppressing the Bourgeoisie.”*

If it is not a state “in the proper sense of the word” then why use the term state at all? Marxists argue because its function remains the same — namely the suppression of one class by another. However, every state that has ever existed has been the organ by which a **minority** ruling class suppresses the majority. As such, the Marxist definition is a-historic in the extreme and extracts a metaphysical essence of the state rather than producing a definition based on empirical evidence.

In order to show the fallacy of Fisher's argument, it is necessary to explain what anarchists think the state is.

The assumption underlying Fisher's argument is that anarchists and Marxists share identical definitions of what a state is. This is not true. Marxists, as Fisher notes, think of a state as simply as an instrument of class rule and so concentrate solely on this function. Anarchists disagree. While we agree that the main function of the state is to defend class society, we also stress the structure of the state has evolved to ensure that role. In the words of Rudolf Rocker:

*“[S]ocial institutions ... do not arise arbitrarily, but are called into being by special needs to serve definite purposes ... The newly arisen possessing classes had need of a political instrument of power to maintain their economic and social privileges over the masses of their own people ... Thus arose the appropriate social conditions for the evolution of the modern state, as the organ of political power of privileged castes and classes for the forcible subjugation and oppression of the non-possessing classes ... Its external forms have altered in the course of its historical development, but its functions have always been the same ... And just as the functions of the bodily organs of ... animals cannot be arbitrarily altered, so that, for example, one cannot at will hear with his eyes and see with his ears, so also one cannot at pleasure transform an organ of social oppression into an instrument for the liberation of the oppressed. The state can only be what it is: the defender of mass-exploitation and social privileges, and creator of privileged classes.”*

[Anarcho-Syndicalism, p. 20]

This means that the structure of the state has evolved to ensure its function. Organ and role are interwoven. Keep one and the other will develop. And what is the structure (or organ) of the state? For anarchists, the state means “the sum total of the political, legislative, judiciary, military and financial institutions through which the management of their own affairs ... are taken away from the people and entrusted to others who ...are vested with the powers to make the laws for everything and everybody, and to oblige the people to observe them, if need be, by the use of collective force.” In summary, it “means the delegation of power, that is the abdication of initiative and sovereignty of all into the hands of a few.” [Anarchy, p. 13 and p. 40]

This structure has not evolved by chance. It is required by its function as the defender of minority class power. As Kropotkin stressed, the bourgeois needed the state:

*“To attack the central power, to strip it of its prerogatives, to decentralise, to dissolve authority, would have been to abandon to the people the control of its affairs, to run the risk of a truly popular revolution. That is why the bourgeoisie sought to reinforce the central government even more...”* [Kropotkin, **Words of a Rebel**, p. 143]

This means that to use the structure of the state (i.e. centralised, hierarchical power in the hands of a few) would soon mean the creation of a new minority class of rulers as the state *“could not survive without creating about it a new privileged class.”* [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, p. 35]

Therefore, for a given social organisation to be a state it must be based on delegated **power**. A state is marked by the centralisation of power into a few hands at the top of the structure, in other words, it is hierarchical in nature. This is, of course, essential for a minority class to remain control over it. Thus a social system which places power at the base, into the hands of the masses, is not a state as anarchists understand it. As Bakunin argued, *“[w]here all rule, there are no more ruled, and there is no State.”* [**The Political Philosophy of Bakunin**, p. 223] Therefore, real workers democracy — i.e. self-management — existed, then the state would no longer exist.

The question now arises, does the Marxist “workers’ state” meet this definition? As indicated in section 4, the answer is a clear yes. In **The State and Revolution**, Lenin argued that the workers’ state would be based on representative democracy. This meant, according to Bakunin, that political power would be *“exercised by proxy, which means entrusting it to a group of men elected to represent and govern them, which in turn will unfailingly return them to all the deceit and subservience of representative or bourgeois rule.”* [**Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings**, p. 255]

Rather than “the vast majority suppressing a tiny minority” we have a tiny minority, elected by the majority, suppressing those who disagree with what the government decrees, including those within the class which the state claims to represent. In the words of Lenin:

*“Without revolutionary coercion directed against the avowed enemies of the workers and peasants, it is impossible to break down the resistance of these exploiters. On the other hand, revolutionary coercion is bound to be employed towards the wavering and unstable elements among the masses themselves.”* [**Collected Works**, vol. 24, p. 170]

And who exercises this “revolutionary coercion”? The majority? No, the vanguard. As Lenin argued, *“the correct understanding of a Communist of his tasks”* lies in *“correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully seize power, when it will be able during and after this seizure of power to obtain support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian toiling masses, and when, thereafter, it will be able to maintain, consolidate, and extend its rule, educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the toilers.”* He stressed that *“to go so far ... as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid.”* [**Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder**, p. 35, p. 27]

In other words, for Lenin, if the leaders exercised their dictatorship, then so did the masses. Such a position is pure and utter nonsense. If the party leaders govern, then the masses do not. And so the “workers’ state” is a state in the normal sense of the word, with the *“minority suppressing the majority.”* This was made clear by Trotsky in 1939:

*“The very same masses are at different times inspired by different moods and objectives. It is just for this reason that a centralised organisation of the vanguard is indispensable. Only a party, wielding the authority it has won, is capable of overcoming the vacillation of the masses themselves.” [The Moralists and Sycophants, p. 59]*

Thus the party (a minority) holds power and uses that power against the masses themselves. Little wonder, given that, once in power, the Bolsheviks quickly forgot their arguments in favour of representative democracy and argued for party dictatorship (see section 4).

Such a transformation of representative democracy into minority class rule was predicted by anarchists:

*“[I]t is not true that once the social conditions are changed the nature and role of government would change. Organ and function are inseparable terms. Take away from an organ its function and either the organ dies or the function is re-established ... A government, that is a group of people entrusted with making laws and empowered to use the collective power to oblige each individual to obey them, is already a privileged class cut off from the people. As any constituted body would do, it will instinctively seek to extend its powers, to be beyond public control, to impose its own policies and to give priority to its special interests. Having been put into a privileged position, the government is already at odds with the people whose strength it disposes of.” [Malatesta, **Anarchy**, pp. 33–4]*

Which, of course, is what happened in Russia. As we indicated in section 4, both Lenin and Trotsky defended the imposition of party rule, its need to be beyond public control, by the necessities generated by the revolution (the “vacillations” within the masses meant that democracy, public control, had to be eliminated in favour of party dictatorship).

Therefore, from an anarchist perspective, the so-called “workers’ state” is still a state in “the proper sense of the word” as it is based on centralised, top-down power. It is based on the tiny minority (the party leaders) governing everyone else and suppressing anyone who disagreed with them — the vast majority.

If the vast majority did have real power then the state would not exist. As the “proletarian” state is based on delegated power, it is still a state and, as such, an instrument of minority class rule. In this case, the minority is the party leaders who will use their new powers to consolidate their position over the masses (while claiming that their rule equals that of the masses).

## **6. Do anarchists “*hope the capitalists do not make any attempts of counterrevolution*”?**

Fisher continues his inventions:

*“Instead of organising an instrument for the coercion of the bourgeois by the proletariat, the Anarchists wish to simply abolish the state overnight and hope that the capitalists do not make any attempts of counterrevolution, an absurd and unrealistic idea.”*

Yes, it would be, if anarchists actually believed that. Sadly for Fisher, we do not and have stated so on many, many, many occasions. Indeed, to make an assertion like this is to show either a total ignorance of anarchist theory or a desire to deceive.

So do anarchists “*hope that the capitalists do not make any attempts of counterrevolution*”? Of course not. We have long argued that a revolution would need to defend itself. In the words of Malatesta:

*“But, by all means, let us admit that the governments of the still unemancipated countries were to want to, and could, attempt to reduce free people to a state of slavery once again. Would this people require a government to defend itself? To wage war men are needed who have all the necessary geographical and mechanical knowledge, and above all large masses of the population willing to go and fight. A government can neither increase the abilities of the former nor the will and courage of the latter. And the experience of history teaches us that a people who really want to defend their own country are invincible: and in Italy everyone knows that before the corps of volunteers (anarchist formations) thrones topple, and regular armies composed of conscripts or mercenaries disappear... [Some people] seem almost to believe that after having brought down government and private property we would allow both to be quietly built up again, because of a respect for the freedom of those who might feel the need to be rulers and property owners. A truly curious way of interpreting our ideas!”* [Anarchy, pp. 40–1]

Elsewhere he argued that a revolution would “*reorganise things in such a way that it will be impossible for bourgeois society to be reconstituted. And all this, and whatever else would be required to satisfy public needs and the development of the revolution would be the task of ... al kinds of committees, local, inter-communal, regional and national congresses which would attend to the co-ordination of social activity ... The creation of voluntary militia ... to deal with any armed attacks by the forces of reaction to re-establish themselves, or to resist outside intervention by countries as yet not in a state of revolution.*” [Life and Ideas, pp. 165–6]

He was not alone in this position. Every revolutionary anarchist argued along these lines. Bakunin, for example, clearly saw the need to defend a revolution:

*“Commune will be organised by the standing federation of the Barricades... [T]he federation of insurgent associations, communes and provinces ... [would] organise a revolutionary force capable of defeating reaction ... it is the very fact of the expansion and organisation of the revolution for the purpose of self-defence among the insurgent areas that will bring about the triumph of the revolution.”* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, pp. 170–1]

And:

*“[L]et us suppose ... it is Paris that starts [the revolution] ... Paris will naturally make haste to organise itself as best it can, in revolutionary style, after the workers have joined into associations and made a clean sweep of all the instruments of labour, every kind of capital and building; armed and organised by streets and **quartiers**, they will form the revolutionary federation of all the **quartiers**, the federative commune... All the French and foreign revolutionary communes will then send representatives to organise*

*the necessary common services ... and to organise common defence against the enemies of the Revolution.” [Op. Cit., p. 178–9]*

He stressed the need to organise and co-ordinate the defence of the revolution by armed workers:

*“Immediately after established government has been overthrown, communes will have to reorganise themselves along revolutionary lines ... In order to defend the revolution, their volunteers will at the same time form a communal militia. But no commune can defend itself in isolation. So it will be necessary for each of them to radiate outwards, to raise all its neighbouring communes in revolt ... and to federate with them for common defence.” [No Gods, No Masters, vol. 1, p. 142]*

Similarly, the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist CNT union recognised the need for defending a revolution in its 1936 resolution on Libertarian Communism:

*“We acknowledge the necessity to defend the advances made through the revolution ... So ... the necessary steps will be taken to defend the new regime, whether against the perils of a foreign capitalist invasion ... or against counter-revolution at home. It must be remembered that a standing army constitutes the greatest danger for the revolution, since its influence could lead to dictatorship, which would necessarily kill off the revolution...”*

*“The people armed will be the best assurance against any attempt to restore the system destroyed from either within or without...”*

*“Let each Commune have its weapons and means of defence ... the people will mobilise rapidly to stand up to the enemy, returning to their workplaces as soon as they may have accomplished their mission of defence...”*

*“1. The disarming of capitalism implies the surrender of weaponry to the communes which be responsible for ensuring defensive means are effectively organised nationwide.*

*“2. In the international context, we shall have to mount an intensive propaganda drive among the proletariat of every country so that it may take an energetic protest, calling for sympathetic action against any attempted invasion by its respective government. At the same time, our Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will render material and moral assistance to all the world’s exploited so that these may free themselves forever from the monstrous control of capitalism and the State.” [quoted by Jose Peirats, **The CNT in the Spanish Revolution**, vol. 1, p. 110]*

If it was simply a question of consolidating a revolution and its self-defence then there would be no argument. Rather the question is one of power — will power be centralised, held by a handful of leaders and exercised from the top downwards or will it be decentralised and society run from the bottom-up by working people themselves?

Fisher distorts the real issue and instead invents a straw man which has no bearing at all on the real anarchist position (for further discussion, see sections I.5.14 and J.7.6).

## 7. Are Anarchists simply “*potential Marxists*”?

After creating the straw man argument that anarchists have not thought about counter-revolution, Fisher asserts:

*“The majority of our ‘Anarchist’ friends never thought about this little loop hole, and as for the rest of them they shrug it off, or say something to the effect of the armed proletariat themselves will stop capitalist reaction, which, an armed proletariat in reality, is a proletarian ‘state’! In conclusion our ‘Anarchists’ are simply potential Marxists who need access to genuinely revolutionary ideas.”*

Of course, anarchists have thought about this and have come up with, as Fisher puts it, “*the armed proletariat*.” Indeed, anarchists have held this position since the days of Bakunin, as we proved in the last section.

Moreover, from an anarchist perspective, an “armed proletariat” is not a “state” as there is not minority of rulers telling the proletariat what to do (see section 5). The “proletariat” state of Lenin was a real state simply because it was the Bolshevik party leaders who were telling the armed forces of the state what to do and who to repress (including striking workers, anarchists and rebelling peasants). These forces, we must note, were organised from the top-down, with the government appointing officers. It was an “armed proletariat” only in the same sense that the bourgeois army is an “armed proletariat” (i.e. working class people made by the rank and file, fought the battles and followed the orders decided upon by a handful of people at the top).

So, if defence of a revolution by the armed proletariat makes you a Marxist then Bakunin, Malatesta, Kropotkin, Goldman, Berkman, Makhno and Durruti were all “Marxists”! As is every revolutionary anarchist. Needless to say, this is impossible and, as such, Fisher’s “little loop hole” in anarchism does not exist.

Clearly, Fisher has no understanding of anarchist thought and prefers invention rather than research.

Our Trotskyist then states that:

*“It is our job, as Marxists to explain these ideas to them!”*

In other words, the Marxist job is to explain anarchist ideas to anarchists and call them Marxism. How impressive!

## 8. Is Marxism scientific?

Fisher finishes by arguing that:

*“As Lenin states, ‘the ideas of Marx are all powerful, because they are true’! We have the science of dialectics on our side, not idealism, mysticism or theology. Our philosophy is solid as a rock.”*

Firstly, dialectics is not a science. Secondly, quoting Lenin on the wonders of Marxism is like quoting the Pope on the joys of Catholicism. Thirdly, the only rocks around are in the heads of Trotskyists if they really think this nonsense about anarchism.



Simply put, a science involves investigating the facts of what is being investigated and generating theories based on those facts. Clearly, our Trotskyist has not bothered to discover the facts about anarchism. He has made numerous assertions about anarchism which are contradicted by the works of anarchism. He has, as such, ignored the fundamental nature of science and has, instead, embraced the approach of the fiction writer.

As such, if Fisher's article is an example of the "science" of Marxism then we can safely state that Marxism is not a science. Rather it is based on invention and slander.

## 9. What does the Russian Revolution tell us about Trotskyism?

Our Trotskyist decides to quote another Trotskyist, Ted Grant, on the dangers of anarchism:

*"However, the setting up of soviets and strike committees — important as it is — does not solve the fundamental problem facing the Russian workers. In and of themselves, soviets solve nothing. What is decisive is the party that leads them. In February 1917, the workers and soldiers set up soviets — a step of enormous importance to the revolution. But in the hands of the Mensheviks and SRs they were reduced to impotence... In Germany in November 1918, the soviets were in the hands of the Social Democratic leaders who betrayed the revolution and handed power back to the bourgeoisie. Under these conditions the soviets soon dissolved, and were merely transient phenomena. The same would have happened in Russia, if it had not been for the Bolshevik Party and the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky."*

Grant is, of course, just paraphrasing Trotsky in his analysis. Moreover, like Trotsky's, his comments indicate the fundamentally dictatorial nature of Trotskyism.

Simply put, if the "leadership" of the party is the key to soviet power, then if the workers' reject that leadership via soviet elections then the Trotskyist is on the horns of a dilemma. Without party "leadership" then the soviets will be "reduced to impotence" and be "merely transient phenomena." To maintain this party "leadership" (and ensure the soviet power) then the democratic nature of the soviets must be undermined. Therefore the Trotskyist is in the ironic situation of thinking that soviet democracy will undermine soviet power.

This dilemma was solved, in practice, by Trotsky during the Russian Revolution — he simply placed party "leadership" above soviet democracy. In other words, he maintained soviet power by turning the soviets into "nothing." He argued this position numerous times in his life, when he was in power and after he had been expelled from Russia by Stalin.

In 1920, we find Trotsky's thoughts on this subject in his infamous work **Terrorism and Communism**. In this work he defended the fact of Communist Party dictatorship:

*"We have more than once been accused of having substituted for the dictatorship of the Soviets the dictatorship of our party. Yet it can be said with complete justice that the dictatorship of the Soviets became possible only by means of the dictatorship of the party. It is thanks to the clarity of its theoretical vision and its strong revolutionary organisation that the party has afforded to the Soviets the possibility of becoming transformed from shapeless parliaments of labour into the apparatus of the supremacy of labour. In this 'substitution' of the power of the party for the power of the working class there is*

*nothing accidental, and in reality there is no substitution at all. The Communists express the fundamental interests of the working class. It is quite natural that, in the period in which history brings up those interests, in all their magnitude, on to the order of the day, the Communists have become the recognised representatives of the working class as a whole."*

Needless to say, this is incredulous. How can the replacement of soviet power by party power mean the "supremacy of labour"? It means the supremacy of the Bolshevik party, not "labour." The transformation of the soviets from genuine democratic organs of working class self-government ("shapeless parliaments of labour") into an instrument of Bolshevik party rule ("the apparatus of the supremacy of labour") cannot be seen as a victory of democracy, quite the reverse. The dictatorship of the Bolshevik party marginalised the soviets just as much as the events of the German Revolution. The only difference is that under the Bolsheviks they maintained a symbolic existence.

Therefore, rather than the "leadership" of the Bolshevik party ensuring soviet rule it meant, in practice, party dictatorship. The soviets played no role in the decision making process as power rested firmly in the hands of the party.

This position was repeated in 1937, in his essay *"Bolshevism and Stalinism."* There he argued that a *"revolutionary party, even having seized power ... is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* He stressed that *"the proletariat can take power only through its vanguard"* and that *"[t]hose who propose the abstraction of the Soviets from the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the party dictatorship were the Soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat."* [Trotsky, **Stalinism and Bolshevism**]

Therefore, we have the same position. Without party dictatorship, the soviets would fall back into the *"mud of reformism."* He argued that the *"fact that this party subordinates the Soviets politically to its leaders has in itself abolished the Soviet system no more than the domination of the conservative majority has abolished the British parliamentary system."* [Op. Cit.] This analogy is flawed for two reasons.

Firstly, the parliamentary system is based on a division between executive and legislative functions. Lenin argued that the soviet system would, like the Paris Commune, abolish this division and so ensure *"the conversion of the representative institutions from mere 'talking shops' into working bodies."* [The Essential Lenin, p. 304] If the decisions being made by the Soviets have been decided upon by the leaders of the Bolshevik party then the soviets represent those leaders, not the people who elected them. As in the bourgeois system, the representatives of the people govern them rather than express the wishes of the majority. As such, the idea that the Soviets are organs of working class self-government **has** been abolished. Instead, they are mere "talking shops" with power resting in the hands of the party leadership.

Secondly, when elections take place parliamentary system it is generally recognised that the majority of representatives can become the government. The system is therefore based on the assumption that the government is accountable to parliament, not parliament to the government. This means that the "domination" of the majority within Parliament is an expression of parliamentary democracy. The majority party does not maintain that only its existence in power ensures that parliamentary democracy can continue, therefore necessitating the suppression of elections. However, that is the position of Trotsky (and of Lenin) and, let us not forget, the actual actions of the Bolsheviks.

That this is the logical conclusion of Trotsky's position can be seen when he discusses the Kronstadt rebellion of March 1921 (see the appendix on "What was the Kronstadt Rebellion?"). In 1938, he argued that the "Kronstadt slogan" was "soviets without Communists." [Lenin and Trotsky, *Kronstadt*, p. 90] This, of course, is factually incorrect. The Kronstadt slogan was "*all power to the soviets but not to the parties*" (or "*free soviets*"). From this incorrect assertion, Trotsky argued as follows:

*"to free the soviets from the leadership [!] of the Bolsheviks would have meant within a short time to demolish the soviets themselves. The experience of the Russian soviets during the period of Menshevik and SR domination and, even more clearly, the experience of the German and Austrian soviets under the domination of the Social Democrats, proved this. Social Revolutionary-anarchist soviets could only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship. They could play no other role, regardless of the 'ideas' of their participants. The Kronstadt uprising thus had a counterrevolutionary character."* [Op. Cit., p. 90]

Interesting logic. Let us assume that the result of free elections would have been the end of Bolshevik "leadership" (i.e. dictatorship), as seems likely. What Trotsky is arguing is that to allow workers to vote for their representatives would "*only serve as a bridge from the proletarian dictatorship*"!

This argument was made (in 1938) as a **general point** and is **not** phrased in terms of the problems facing the Russian Revolution in 1921. In other words Trotsky is clearly arguing for the dictatorship of the party and contrasting it to soviet democracy. As he put it elsewhere, the "*revolutionary party (vanguard) which renounces its own dictatorship surrenders the masses to the counter-revolution.*" [Writings 1936–7, pp. 513–4] So much for "All Power to the Soviets" or "workers' power"!

Clearly, Grant's and Trotsky's arguments contain a deeply undemocratic core. The logic of their position — namely that party rule is essential to ensure soviet rule — in practice means that soviet rule is replaced by party dictatorship. To include the masses into the decision making process by soviet democracy means loosening the tight political control of the party on the soviets and allowing the possibility that opposition forces may win in the soviets. However, if that happens then it means the end of soviet power as that is only possible by means of party "leadership." This, in turn, necessitates party dictatorship to maintain "soviet power", as Trotsky and Lenin admitted and implemented.

Simply put, Grant's argument shows the dangers of Trotskyism, not of anarchism.

## 10. Do anarchists reject "leadership"?

Grant continues by asserting the need for leaders:

*"Some say that such a party is not necessary, that the workers do not need a party, that it leads to bureaucracy, and so on. That is a fatal error. The whole history of the international workers' movement shows the absolute need for a revolutionary party. Anarchism is an expression of impotence, which can offer no way out. Of course, the reason why some honest workers and young people turn towards anarchism is because of their*

*revulsion against Stalinism and the bureaucratic and class collaborationist policies of the existing leaderships, both on the political and trade union field. This is understandable, but profoundly mistaken. The answer to a bad leadership is not no leadership, but to create a leadership that is worthy of the workers' cause. To refuse to do this, to abstain from the political struggle ... amounts to handing over the workers to the existing leaders without a struggle. In order to combat the policy of class collaboration, it is necessary to pose an alternative in the form of a revolutionary policy, and therefore also a revolutionary tendency."*

There are so many fallacies in this argument it is hard to know where to start.

Firstly, we should note that anarchists do not deny the need for "leaders" nor for the need for revolutionaries to organise together to influence the class struggle. To claim so indicates a failure to present the anarchist case honestly.

In the words of Kropotkin:

*"The idea of anarchist communism, today represented by ... minorities, but increasingly finding popular expression, will make its way among the mass of the people. Spreading everywhere, the anarchist groups ... will take strength from the support they find among the people."* [Words of a Rebel, p. 75]

Bakunin considered it essential that revolutionaries organise and influence the masses. As he put it, *"the chief aim and purpose of this organisation"* is to *"help the people towards self-determination on the lines of the most complete equality."* [Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, p. 191]

Therefore, to claim that anarchists deny the need for political organisation and "leaders" is a misrepresentation. As we argue in more depth in section J.3, this is not the case. However, we must stress that anarchists do not seek positions of power ("leadership") in organisations. Rather, they aim to influence by the power of our ideas, *"through the natural, personal influence of its members, who have not the slightest power."* [Bakunin, Op. Cit., p. 193] This is because "leadership" positions in hierarchical organisations are a source of corruption, which is the second major fallacy in Grant's argument.

While acknowledging that the existing leadership of working class organisations and unions are *"bureaucratic and class collaborationist,"* he does not indicate why this is so. He argued that we need a "new" leadership, with the correct ideas, to replace the current ones. However, the *"policy of class collaboration"* within these leaderships did not develop by chance. Rather they are a product of both the tactics (such as electioneering, in the case of political parties) and structures used in these organisations.

Looking at structures, we can clearly see that hierarchy is key. By having leadership positions separate from the mass of workers (i.e. having hierarchical structures), an inevitable division develops between the leaders and the rank and file. The "leaders" are insulated from the life, interests and needs of the membership. Their views adjust to their position, not vice versa, and so "leadership" becomes institutionalised and quickly becomes bureaucratic. As Bakunin argued, the only way to avoid bureaucracy is to empower the rank and file.

Taking the Geneva section of the IWMA, Bakunin noted that the construction workers' section *"simply left all decision-making to their committees ... In this manner power gravitated to the*

*committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of all governments the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of the membership.*” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 246] To combat this bureaucracy, *“the construction workers ... sections could only defend their rights and their autonomy in only one way: the workers called general membership meetings. Nothing arouses the antipathy of the committees more than these popular assemblies... In these great meetings of the sections, the items on the agenda was amply discussed and the most progressive opinion prevailed...”* [Op. Cit., p. 247]

This did not mean the end of organisations and committees, but rather a change in power. Any committees would be made up of *“delegates who conscientiously fulfilled all their obligations to their respective sections as stipulated in the statutes,” “reporting regularly to the membership the proposals made and how they voted” and “asking for further instructions (plus instant recall of unsatisfactory delegates).”* [Ibid.] Power would be in the hands of the rank and file, not the committees.

It is in this context that anarchists try and give a lead. Anarchist organisation *“rules out any idea of dictatorship and of a controlling and directive power”* and it *“will promote the Revolution only through the **natural but never official influence** of all members of the Alliance.”* [Op. Cit., p. 154 and p. 387] This influence would be exerted in the basic assemblies of the organisation, which would retain the power to decide their own fates: *“In such a system, power, properly speaking, no longer exists. Power is diffused to the collectivity and becomes the true expression of the liberty of everyone, the faithful and sincere realisation of the will of all.”* [Op. Cit., p. 415]

Only in this way can the bad effects of having institutionalised “leadership” positions be avoided. Instead of ignoring “bad” leadership, anarchists encourage workers to rely on their own initiative and power. They do not “refuse” to combat bureaucratic leaderships, rather they combat them from below by ensuring that workers manage their own affairs directly. As such, anarchists are well aware of the need *“to pose an alternative in the form of a revolutionary policy, and therefore also a revolutionary tendency.”*

As Malatesta argued, we *“do not want to **emancipate** the people; we want the people to **emancipate themselves**.”* Thus anarchists *“advocate and practise direct action, decentralisation, autonomy and individual initiative; they should make special efforts to help members [of popular organisations] learn to participate directly in the life of the organisation and to dispense with leaders and full-time functionaries.”* However, *“[w]e must not wait to achieve anarchy, in the meantime limiting ourselves to simple propaganda ... We must seek to get all people ... to make demands, and impose itself and take for itself all the improvements and freedoms that it desires as and when it reaches the state of wanting them, and the power to demand them: and in always propagating all aspects of our programme, and always struggling for its complete realisation, we must push people to want always more and to increase its pressures, until it has reached complete emancipation.”* [Life and Ideas, p. 90, p. 125 and p. 189]

He, like all anarchists, stressed there were different kinds of “leadership”:

*“It is possible to direct [“lead”] through advice and example, leaving the people — provided with the opportunities and means of supplying their own needs themselves — to adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others. But it is also possible to direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government and imposing one’s own ideas and interests through police methods.”* [The Anarchist Revolution, p. 108]

Unsurprisingly, anarchists favour the first way of “leading” people and utterly reject the second.

Clearly, then, anarchists do not reject being “leaders” in the sense of arguing our ideas and combating the influence and power of bureaucratic leaderships. However, this “lead” is based on the influence of our ideas and, as such, is a non-hierarchical relationship between anarchist activists and other workers. Thus Grant’s argument is a straw man.

Finally, his comment that “*whole history of the international workers’ movement shows the absolute need for a revolutionary party*” is simply false. Every example of a “revolutionary party” has been a failure. They have never created a socialist society which, let us not forget, was their aim. The first “revolutionary” party was Social Democracy. That quickly became reformist and, in Germany, crushed the revolution that broke out there after the end of the First World War.

The Bolshevik party was no better. It soon transformed itself for being the masses servant to being its master (see section 4). It justified its repression against the working class in terms of its “vanguard” position. When it degenerated into Stalinism, Communist Parties across the world followed it — no matter how insane its policies became.

This is unsurprising. As the anarchists of Trotwatch explain, such a “revolutionary” party leaves much to be desired:

*“In reality, a Leninist Party simply reproduces and institutionalises existing capitalist power relations inside a supposedly ‘revolutionary’ organisation: between leaders and led; order givers and order takers; between specialists and the acquiescent and largely powerless party workers. And that elitist power relation is extended to include the relationship between the party and class.” [Carry on Recruiting!, p. 41]*

Therefore, while anarchists stress the need to organise as anarchists (i.e. into political associations) they reject the need for a “revolutionary party” in the Marxist or Leninist mold. Rather than seeking power on behalf of the masses, anarchist groups work within the mass organisations of the working class and urge them to take and exercise power directly, without governments and without hierarchy. We seek to win people over to our ideas and, as such, we work with others as equals using debate and discussion to influence the class struggle (see section J.3.6 for fuller details and a discussion of how this differs from the Trotskyist position).

Therefore, Grant’s whole argument is flawed. Anarchists do not reject “leadership,” they reject hierarchical leadership. We clearly see the need to organise politically to influence the class struggle but do so as equals, by the strength of our ideas. We do not seek to create or seize positions of “leadership” (i.e. power) but rather seek to ensure that the masses manage their own affairs and are influenced by political tendencies only in-so-far as they can be convinced of the validity of the politics and ideas of those tendencies.

## 11. Does the Spanish Revolution show anarchism is flawed?

As usual, Grant brings up the question of the Spanish Revolution:

*“The anarchist workers of the CNT played a heroic role in the struggle against fascism. In July 1936, they rose up and stormed the barracks armed with just sticks and knives and a few old hunting rifles, and beat the fascists. They set up soviets and established*

*a workers' militia and workers' control in the factories. The CNT and the POUM (a centrist party led by ex-Trotskyists) were the only power in Barcelona. Soon the whole of Catalonia was in the hands of the workers. The bourgeois President of Catalonia, Lluís Companys, actually invited the CNT to take power! But the anarchist leaders refused to take power, and the opportunity was lost."*

Needless to say, this summary leaves much to be desired.

Firstly, there are the factual errors. The offer to the CNT from Companys occurred on July 20<sup>th</sup>, immediately after the uprising had been defeated in Barcelona. The situation in the rest of Catalonia, never mind Spain, was unknown. This fact is essential to understanding the decisions made by the CNT. Faced with a military coup across the whole of Spain intent on introducing fascism, the outcome of which was unknown, the CNT in Barcelona was in a difficult situation. If it tried to implement libertarian communism then it would have had to fight both the fascist army and the Republican state. Faced with this possibility, the CNT leaders decided to ignore their politics and collaborate with other anti-fascists within the bourgeois state. Needless to say, to fail to indicate the rationale for the CNT's decision and the circumstances it was made in means to misinform the reader. This does not mean the CNT's decision was correct, it is just to indicate the extremely difficult circumstances in which it was made.

Secondly, Grant lets the cat out of the bag by admitted that he sees the Spanish Revolution in terms of the anarchist "*leaders*" taking power. In this he followed Trotsky, who had argued that:

*"A revolutionary party, even having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers), is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society."* [**"Stalinism and Bolshevism"**]

Clearly, rather than the masses taking power, Trotskyism sees the party (the leaders) having the real power in society. Trotsky stressed this fact elsewhere when he argued that "*[b]ecause the leaders of the CNT renounced dictatorship for themselves they left the place open for the Stalinist dictatorship.*" [**Writings 1936–7**, p. 514]

The "*anarchist leaders*" quite rightly rejected this position, but they also rejected the anarchist one as well. Let us not forget that the anarchist position is the destruction of the state by means of federations of workers associations (see section 3). The CNT refused to do this. Which, of course, means that Grant is attacking anarchist theory in spite of the fact that the CNT **ignored** that theory!

As we have discussed this issue in depth elsewhere (namely sections I.8.10, I.8.11 and section 20 of the appendix "*Marxists and Spanish Anarchism*") we will leave our discussion of the Spanish Revolution to this short summary.

## 12. Does anarchism believe in spontaneous revolution?

Grant now asserts another erroneous position to anarchism, namely the believe that anarchists believe in spontaneous revolution. He presents the case of the Albanian revolution:

*"However, the most crushing answer to anarchism is the fate of the Albanian revolution. The Albanian masses, as the result of the nightmare brought about by the collapse of*

*so-called market reform ... rose up in a spontaneous insurrection. With no organisation, no leadership, and no conscious plan, they stormed the barracks with their bare hands. The army fraternised ... opened the gates of the barracks and distributed arms. Revolutionary committees were established, especially in the South, and the armed militias spread the revolt from one town to the next. The forces of reaction sent by Berisha were routed by the armed people. There was nothing to stop them from entering Tirana ... But here the importance of leadership becomes clear. Lacking a revolutionary leadership with the perspective of taking power and transforming society, the insurrectionists failed to take Tirana."*

Needless to say, the argument for "a revolutionary leadership" with "the perspective of taking power" is hard to combine with his later argument that "the Russian workers, basing themselves on their own strength and organisation, [must] take power into their own hands." As Grant has argued throughout this excerpt, the idea that the workers should take power themselves is utopian as a Bolshevik style leadership is required to seize power. As Trotsky and Lenin made clear, the working class as a whole cannot exercise the "proletariat dictatorship" — only party dictatorship can ensure the transition from capitalism to communism. In summary, Grant is simply using the old Bolshevik technique of confusing the party with the proletariat.

However, this is besides the point. Grant asserts that anarchists think a revolution can occur spontaneously, without the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists and argue their politics. Needless to say, anarchists do not hold such a position and never have. If we did then anarchists would not write books, pamphlets and leaflets, they would not produce papers and take part in struggles and they would not organise anarchist groups and federations. As we do all that, clearly we do not think that an anarchist society will come about without us trying to create it. As such, Grant's comments misrepresent the anarchist position.

This can be seen from Bakunin, who argued that the 1848 revolutions failed "for a quite a simple reason: it was rich in instinct and in negative theoretical ideas ... but it was still totally devoid of the positive and practical ideas which would have been necessary to build a new system ... on the ruins of the bourgeois world. The workers who fought for the emancipation of the people in June were united by instinct, not ideas ... This was the principal cause of their defeat." [Michael Bakunin: *Selected Writings*, p. 104]

Given that "instinct as a weapon is not sufficient to safeguard the proletariat against the reactionary machinations of the privileged classes," instinct "left to itself, and inasmuch as it has not been transformed into consciously reflected, clearly determined thought, lends itself easily to falsification, distortion and deceit." [The Political Philosophy of Bakunin, p. 215] Therefore, the "goal, then, is to make the worker fully aware of what he [or she] wants, to unjam within him [or her] a steam of thought corresponding to his [or her] instinct." This is done by "a single path, that of **emancipation through practical action**," by "workers' solidarity in their struggle against the bosses," of "collective struggle of the workers against the bosses." This would be complemented by socialist organisations "propagandis[ing] its principles." [The Basic Bakunin, p. 102, p. 103 and p. 109]

Hence the need for anarchists to organise as anarchists:

*"The Alliance [Bakunin's anarchist group] is the necessary complement to the International [the revolutionary workers' movement]. But the International and the Alliance,*



*while having the same ultimate aims, perform different functions. The International endeavours to unify the working masses ... regardless of nationality and national boundaries or religious and political beliefs, into one compact body; the Alliance ... tries to give these masses a really revolutionary direction. The programs of one and the other, without being opposed, differ in the degree of their revolutionary development. The International contains in germ, but only in germ, the whole program of the Alliance. The program of the Alliance represents the fullest unfolding of the International.” [Bakunin on Anarchism, p. 157]*

Thus only by arguing for anarchist ideas can anarchy come about. It will not come about by accident. Hence Malatesta’s argument that anarchists “*must deepen, develop and propagate our ideas and co-ordinate our forces in a common action. We must act within the labour movement ... [W]e must act in such a way that it contributes to preparing for a complete social transformation. We must work with the unorganised ... masses to awaken the spirit of revolt and the desire and hope for a free and happy life. We must initiate and support all movements that tend to weaken the forces of the State and of capitalism and to raise the mental level and material conditions of the workers... And then, in the revolution, we must take an energetic part (if possible before and more effectively than the others) in the essential material struggle and drive it to the utmost limit in destroying all the repressive forces of the State. We must encourage the workers to take possession of the means of production ... and of stocks of manufactured goods; to organise immediately, on their own, an equitable distribution of ... products ... and for the continuation and intensification of production and all services useful to the public. We must ... promote action by the workers’ associations, the co-operatives, the voluntary groups — to prevent the emergence of new authoritarian powers, new governments, opposing them with violence if necessary, but above all rendering them useless.*” [The Anarchist Revolution, pp. 109–110]

A key process of this is to argue that workers’ organisations become the framework of the new world and smash the state. As Murray Bookchin argues, anarchists “*seek to persuade the factory committees, assemblies [and other organisations created by people in struggle] ... to make themselves into genuine organs of popular self-management, not to dominate them, manipulate them, or hitch them to an all-knowing political party.*” [Post-Scarcity Anarchism, p. 217] For more discussion of this issue, see section J.7.5 (What is the role of anarchists in a social revolution?).

Clearly, rather than being “*the most crushing answer to anarchism,*” the fate of the Albanian revolution rather shows how inaccurate Grant’s argument is. Anarchists do not hold the position he states we do, as we have proven. Anarchists were not surprised by the fate of the Albanian revolution as the Albanian workers were not fighting for an anarchist society but rather were protesting against the existing system. The role of anarchists in such a struggle would have been to convince those involved to smash the existing state and create a new society based on federations of workers’ associations. That this was not done suggests that anarchist ideas were not the dominant ones in the revolt and, therefore, it is hardly surprising that the revolution failed.

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